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THE

LOVELS OF ARDEN

A Novel

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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THE LOVELS OF ARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

ONLY A PORTRAIT-PAINTER.

WHILE Clarissa was pondering on that perplexing question, how she was to see her brother frequently without Mr. Granger's knowledge, fortune had favoured her in a manner she had never anticipated. After what Mr. Fairfax had said to her about Austin Lovel's 'set,' the last thing she expected was to meet her brother in society—that fast Bohemian world in which she supposed him to exist, seemed utterly remote from the faultless circle of Daniel Granger's acquaintance. It happened, however, that one of the dearest friends to whom Lady Laura Armstrong had introduced her sweet Clarissa was a lady of the Leo-Hunter genus—a certain Madame Caballero, *née* Bondichori,

a little elderly Frenchwoman, with sparkling black eyes and inexhaustible vivacity; the widow of a Portuguese wine-merchant; a lady whose fortune enabled her to occupy a first floor in one of the free-stone palaces of the Champs Elysées, to wear black velvet and diamonds in perpetuity, and to receive a herd of small lions and a flock of admiring nobodies twice a-week. The little widow prided herself on her worship of genius. All members of the lion tribe came alike to her: painters, sculptors, singers, actors, and performers upon every variety of known and unknown musical instrument; budding barristers, who had won forensic laurels by the eloquent defence of some notorious criminal; homœopathic doctors, lady doctresses, or lawyeresses, or deaconesses, from America; and pretty women who had won a kind of renown by something special in the way of eyebrows, or arms, or shoulders.

To these crowded saloons Mr. Granger brought his wife and daughter one evening. They found a great many people assembled in three lofty rooms, hung with amber satin, in the remotest and smallest of which apartments Madame Caballero made tea *à l'Anglaise*, for her intimates; while, in the largest, some fearful and wonderful instrumental music was

going on, with the very smallest possible amount of attention from the audience. There was a perpetual buzz of conversation; and there was a considerable sprinkling of curious-looking people, weird men with long unkempt hair, strong-minded women, who counterbalanced these in a manner by wearing their hair preternaturally short. Altogether, the assembly was an unusual one; but Madame Caballero's guests seemed to enjoy themselves very much. Their good spirits may have been partly due to the fact that they had the pleasing anticipation of an excellent supper, furnished with all the choicest dainties that Chevet can provide; for Madame Caballero's receptions were of a substantial order, and she owed a good deal of her popularity to the profusion that distinguished the commissariat department.

Mr. and Mrs. Granger made their way to the inner room by and by. It was the prettiest room of the three, with a great semicircular window overlooking nothing particular in the daytime, but making a handsome amber-hung recess at night. Here there was a sea-coal fire *à l'Anglaise*, and only a subdued glimmering of wax candles, instead of the broad glare in the larger saloons. Here, too, were to be found the choicest of Madame Caballero's guests: a cabinet

minister, an ambassador, a poet of some standing, and one of the most distinguished sopranos of the season, a fair-haired German girl, with great pathetic blue eyes.

Even in this society Madame Caballero was rejoiced to see her sweet Mrs. Granger and her charming Miss Granger, who was looking unutterably stiff, in mauve silk and white lace. The lady and her friends had been talking of some one as the Grangers entered, talking rapturously.

'*J'en raffole!*' exclaimed Madame; 'such a charming young man, gifted with talents of the most original order.'

The ambassador was looking at a portrait—the likeness of Madame Caballero herself—a mere sketch in oils, with a mark of the brush upon it, but remarkable for the *chic* and daring of the painter's style, and for that idealised resemblance which is always so agreeable to the subject.

Clarissa's heart gave a little throb. The picture was like one she had seen on the easel in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard.

'*Mais c'est charmant!*' exclaimed the ambassador; and the adjective was echoed in every key by the rest of the little coterie.

'I expect him here this evening,' said Madame; 'and I shall be very much gratified if you will permit me to present him to your excellency.'

The ambassador bowed. 'Any *protégé* of Madame's,' he said, and so on.

Mr. Granger, who was really a judge of art, fastened on to the picture immediately.

'There's something fresh in the style, Clary,' he said. 'I should like this man to paint your portrait. What's the signature? Austin! That's hardly a French name, I should think—eh, Madame Caballero?'

'No,' replied Madame; 'Mr. Austin is an Englishman. I shall be charmed if you will allow him to paint Mrs. Granger; and I'm sure he will be delighted to have such a subject.'

There was a good deal of talk about Mr. Austin's painting, and art in general. There were some half-dozen pictures of the modern French school in this inner room, which helped to sustain the conversation. Mr. Granger talked very fair French, of a soundly grammatical order; and Clarissa's tongue ran almost as gaily as in her schoolgirl days at Belforêt. She was going to see her brother—to see him shining in good society, and not in the pernicious 'set' of which George Fairfax had spoken. The thought

was rapture to her. They might have a few minutes' talk to themselves, perhaps, before the evening was over. That interview in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard had been so sadly brief, and her heart too full for many words.

Austin Lovel came in presently, looking his handsomest, in his careful evening-dress, with a brilliant light in his eyes, and that appearance of false brightness which is apt to distinguish the man who is burning the candle of life at both ends. Only by just the faintest elevation of his eyebrows did he betray his surprise as he looked at his sister; and his air, on being presented to her a few moments afterwards, was perfect in its serene unconsciousness.

Mr. Granger talked to him of his picture pleasantly enough, but very much as he would have talked to his architect, or to one of his clerks in the great Bradford establishment. There was a marked difference between the tone of the rich English trader and the German ambassador, when he expressed himself on the subject of Mr. Austin's talent; but then the Englishman intended to give the painter a commission, and the German did not.

'I should like you to paint my wife—and—and—my daughter,' said Mr. Granger, throwing in Sophia

as an afterthought. It would be only civil to have his daughter's portrait painted, he thought.

Mr. Austin bowed. 'I shall be most happy,' he said.

Clarissa's eyes sparkled with delight. Sophia Granger saw the pleased look, and thought, 'O, the vanity of these children of perdition!' But she did not offer any objection to the painting of her own likeness.

'When shall we begin?' asked Mr. Granger.

'My time is entirely at your disposal.'

'In that case, the sooner the thing is done the better. My wife cannot come to your studio—she has so many claims upon her time—but that would make no difficulty, I suppose?'

'Not at all. I can paint Mrs. Granger in her own rooms as well as in mine, if the light will serve.'

'One of our drawing-rooms faces the north,' answered Mr. Granger, 'and the windows are large—larger than I like. Any loss of time which you may suffer in accommodating Mrs. Granger must, of course, be considered in the price of your pictures.'

'I have only one price for my pictures,' replied Mr. Austin, with a loftiness that astonished his patron. 'I charge fifty guineas for a portrait of that kind—

whether it is painted for a duke or a grocer in the Rue St. Honoré.'

'I will give you a hundred guineas for each of the pictures, if they are successes,' said Mr. Granger. 'If they are failures, I will give you your own price, and make you a present of the canvases.'

'I am not a stoic, and have no objection to accept a premium of a hundred guineas from so distinguished a capitalist as Mr. Granger,' returned Austin Lovel, smiling. 'I don't think Mrs. Granger's portrait will be a failure,' he added confidently, with a little look at Clarissa.

Sophia Granger saw the look, and resented it. The painter had said nothing of her portrait. It was of Clarissa's only that he thought. It was a very small thing; but when her father's wife was concerned, small things were great in the eyes of Miss Granger.

There was no opportunity for confidential talk between Austin Lovel and his sister that evening; but Clarissa went home happy in the expectation of seeing her brother very often in the simplest easiest way. The portraits would take some time to paint, of course; indeed Austin might make the business last almost as long as he liked.

It was rather hard, however, to have to discuss her brother's merits with Mr. and Miss Granger as if he had been a stranger; and Clarissa had to do this going home in the carriage that night, and at breakfast next morning. The young man was handsome, Mr. Granger remarked, but had rather a worn look—a dissipated look, in point of fact. That sort of people generally were dissipated.

Mrs. Granger ventured to say that she did not think Mr. Austin looked dissipated—a little worn, perhaps, but nothing more; and that might be the effect of hard work.

'My dear Clary, what can you know of the physiology of dissipation? I tell you that young man is dissipated. I saw him playing *écarté* with a Frenchman just before we left Madame Caballero's; and, unless I am profoundly mistaken, the man is a gambler.'

Clarissa shuddered. She could not forget what George Fairfax had said to her about her brother's ways, nor the fact that her remittances had seemed of so little use to him. He seemed in good repute too, and talked of fifty guineas for a picture with the utmost coolness. He must have earned a good deal of money, and the money must have gone somewhere.

In all the details of his home there was evidence of extravagance in the past and poverty in the present.

He came at eleven o'clock on the second morning after Madame Caballero's reception; came in a hired carriage, with his easel and all the paraphernalia of his art. Mr. Granger had made a point of being present at this first sitting, much to the discomfiture of Clarissa, who was yearning for a long uninterrupted talk with her brother. Even when Mr. Granger was absent, there would be Miss Granger most likely, she thought, with vexation; and, after all, these meetings with Austin would be only half meetings. It would be pleasant only to see him, to hear his voice; but she was longing to talk freely of the past, to give him counsel for the future.

The drawing-room looking north was rather a dreary apartment, if any apartment furnished with blue-satin damask and unlimited gilding can be called dreary. There was splendour, of course, but it was a chilling kind of splendour. The room was large and square, with two tall wide windows commanding a view of one of the dullest streets in new Paris—a street at the end of which workmen were still busy cutting away a hill, the removal whereof was necessary for the realisation of the Augustan idea of that

archetypal city, which was to be left all marble. Mr. Granger's apartments were in a corner house, and he had the advantage of this side view. There was very little of what Mr. Wemmick called 'portable property' in this northern drawing-room. There were blue-satin divans running along the walls, a couple of blue-satin easy-chairs, an ormolu stand with a monster Sèvres dish for cards, and that was all—a room in which one might 'receive,' but could scarcely live.

The light was capital, Mr. Austin said. He set up his easel, settled the position of his sister, after a little discussion with Mr. Granger, and began work. Clarissa's was to be the first portrait. This being arranged, Mr. Granger departed to write letters, leaving Sophia established, with her Berlin-wool work, at one of the windows. Clarissa would not, of course, like to be left *tête-à-tête* for two or three hours with a strange painter, Miss Granger opined.

Yes, it was very pleasant to have him there, even though their talk was restrained by the presence of a third person, and they could only speak of indifferent things. Perhaps to Austin Lovel himself it was pleasanter to have Miss Granger there than to be quite alone with his sister. He was very fond of Clarissa,

but there was much in his past life—some things in his present life even—that would not bear talking of, and he shrank a little from his sister's tender questioning. Protected by Miss Granger and her Berlin-wool spaniels, he was quite at his ease, and ran gaily on about all manner of things as he sketched his outline and set his palette. He gave the two ladies a lively picture of existing French art, with little satirical touches here and there. Even Sophia was amused, and blushed to find herself comparing the social graces of Mr. Austin the painter with those of Mr. Tillott the curate, very much to the advantage of the former—blushed to find herself so much interested in any conversation that was not strictly utilitarian or evangelical in its drift. Once or twice Austin spoke of his travels, his Australian experiences; and at each mention, Clarissa looked up eagerly, anxious to hear more. The history of her brother's past was a blank to her, and she was keenly interested by the slightest allusion that cast a ray of light upon it. Mr. Austin did not care, however, to dwell much upon his own affairs. It was chiefly of other people that he talked. Throughout that first sitting Miss Granger maintained a dignified formality, tempered by maidenly graciousness. The

young man was amusing, certainly, and it was not often Miss Granger permitted herself to be amused. She thought Clarissa was too familiar with him, treated him too much with an air of perfect equality. A man who painted portraits for hire should be received, Miss Granger thought, as one would receive a superior kind of bootmaker.

More than once, in fact, in the course of that agreeable morning, Clarissa had for a moment forgotten that she was talking to Mr. Austin the painter, and not to her brother Austin Lovel. More than once an unconscious warmth or softness in her tone had made Miss Granger look up from her embroidery-frame with the eyes of wonder.

Mr. Granger came back to the drawing-room, having finished his letter-writing just as the sitting concluded, and, luncheon being announced at the same time, asked Mr. Austin to stay for that meal. Austin had no objection to linger in his sister's society. He wanted to know what kind of man this Daniel Granger was; and perhaps wanted to see what probability there was of Daniel Granger's wife being able to supply him with money in the future. Austin Lovel had, from his earliest boyhood, possessed a fatal capacity for getting rid of money, and

for getting into debt; not common plain-sailing debt, which would lead at the worst to the Bankruptcy Court, but liability of a more disreputable and perilous character, involving the terror of disgrace, and entanglements that would have to be unravelled by a police-magistrate. Racing debts, gambling debts, and bill-discounting transactions, had been the agreeable variety of difficulties which had beset Austin Lovel's military career; and at the end there had been something — something fully known to a few only — which had made the immediate sale of his commission a necessity. He was *allowed* to sell it; and that was much, his friends said. If his commanding officer had not been an easy-going kind of man, he would scarcely have got off so cheaply.

'I wonder how this fellow Granger would treat me, if he knew who I was?' he thought to himself. 'He'd inaugurate our acquaintance by kicking me out of his house most likely, instead of asking me to luncheon.' Notwithstanding which opinion Mr. Austin sat down to share the sacred bread and salt with his brother-in-law, and ate a few morsels of a cutlet *à la Maintenon*, and drank half a bottle of claret, with a perfect enjoyment of the situation. He liked the idea of being patronised by the man who

would not have tolerated his society for a moment, had he been aware of his identity.

He talked of Parisian life during luncheon, keeping carefully clear of all subjects which the 'young person,' as represented by Miss Granger, might blush to hear; and Mr. Granger, who had only an Englishman's knowledge of the city, was amused by the pleasant gossip. The meal lasted longer than usual, and lost all its wonted formality; and the fair Sophia found herself more and more interested in this fascinating painter, with his brilliant dark eyes, and sarcastic mouth, and generally agreeable manner. She sat next him at luncheon, and, when there came a little pause in the conversation, began to question him about the state of the Parisian poor. It was very bad, was it not?

Mr. Austin shrugged his shoulders.

'I don't know,' he said, 'but I don't think it would be possible for a man to starve to death in Paris under the Imperial regime; and it seems very easy for an Englishman to do it in Spitalfields or Mile-end New Town. You don't hear of men and women found dead in their garrets from sheer hunger. But of course there is a good deal of poverty and squalor to be found in the city.'

And then Mr. Austin launched into a graphic description of some interesting phases of life among the lower classes, borrowed from a novel that had been recently delighting the reading public of France, but appropriated with such an air of reality, that Miss Granger fancied this delightful painter must spend some considerable part of his existence as a district visitor or city missionary.

'What a pity that Mr. Tillott has not his persuasive powers!' she thought; Mr. Tillott's eloquence being, in fact, of a very limited order, chiefly exhibiting itself in little jerky questions about the spiritual and temporal welfare of his humble parishioners—questions which, in the vernacular language of agricultural labourers, 'put a chap's back up, somehow.'

'I should like to show Mr. Austin the baby, Daniel,' Clarissa said to her husband shyly, while Miss Granger was keeping Austin hard and fast to the amelioration of the working classes; 'he would make such a lovely picture.'

Mr. Granger smiled, a quiet well-satisfied smile. He, the strong man, the millowner and millionaire, was as weak as the weakest woman in all things concerning the child of his mature age.

'Yes,' he said, with some affectation of indifference; 'Lovel would make a nice picture enough. We'll have him painted if you like, Clary, some day. Send for him, my dear.'

She had her hand upon the bell directly.

'Yes,' she cried, 'he would make the sweetest picture in the world, and Austin shall paint him.'

The familiar mention of the name Austin, *tout court*, scared Mr. Granger almost as much as a cannon fired close at his elbow might have done. He stared at his wife with grave displeasure.

'*Mr.* Austin can paint him some day, if you wish it, Clarissa,' he said.

Mrs. Granger blushed crimson; again she remembered that this brother she loved so dearly was only a strange painter of portraits, whom it behoved her to treat with only the most formal courtesy. She hated the deception; and having a strong faith in her husband's generosity, was sorely tempted to put an end to this acted lie on the spot, and to tell him who his guest was; but fear of her brother's anger stopped her. She had no right to betray him; she must wait his permission to tell the secret.

'Even Sophia seems to like him,' she thought; 'and I don't think Daniel could help being pleased

with him, in spite of anything papa may have said to his prejudice.'

The baby was brought, and, being in a benignant humour, was graciously pleased to look his brightest and prettiest, and in nurse's phraseology, to 'take to' his unknown uncle. The unknown uncle kissed him affectionately, and said some civil things about the colour of his eyes, and the plumpness of his limbs—'quite a Rubens baby,' and so on, but did not consider a boy-baby an especially wonderful creature, having had two boy-babies of his own, and not having particularly wanted them. He looked upon them rather as chronic perplexities, like accommodation bills that had matured unawares.

'And this is the heir of Arden,' he said to himself, as he looked down at the fat blue-eyed thing struggling in Clarissa's arms, with that desperate desire to get nowhere in particular, common to infancy. 'So this little lump of humanity is the future lord of the home that should have been mine. I don't know that I envy him. Country life and Arden would hardly have suited me. I think I'd rather have an *entresol* in the Champs Elysées, and the run of the boulevards, than the gray old Court and a respectable position. Unless a man's tastes

are "horsey" or agricultural, country life must be a bore.'

Mr. Austin patted the plump young cheeks without any feeling of enmity.

'Poor little beggar! What ghosts will haunt him in the old rooms by and by, I wonder?' he said to himself, smiling down at the child.

CHAPTER II.

AUSTIN'S PROSPECTS.

THE picture made rapid progress. For his very life —though the finishing of his work had been the signal of his doom, and the executioner waiting to make a sudden end of him when the last touch was laid upon the canvas, Austin Lovel could not have painted slowly. The dashing offhand brush was like a young thoroughbred, that could not be pulled, let the jockey saw at his mouth as he might. And yet the painter would have liked much to prolong this easy intercourse with his sister. But after Clarissa's portrait was finished, there was Miss Granger to be painted; and then they would want a picture of that unapproachable baby, no doubt; and after that, perhaps, Mr. Granger might consent to have his massive features perpetuated. Austin considered that the millionaire should be good for three hundred guineas or so; he had promised two hundred, and the painter

was spending the money by anticipation as fast as he could.

He came every other morning to the Rue de Morny, and generally stayed to luncheon; and those mornings spent in his company were very pleasant to Clarissa—as pleasant as anything could be which involved deception; there was always the sting of that fact. Miss Granger was rarely absent for ten minutes together on these occasions; it was only some lucky chance which took her from the room to fetch more Berlin wool, or a forgotten skein of floss silk for the perennial spaniels, and afforded the brother and sister an opportunity for a few hurried words. The model villagers almost faded out of Miss Granger's mind in this agreeable society. She found herself listening to talk about things which were of the earth earthy, and was fain to confess herself interested in the conversation. She dressed as carefully to receive the painter as if he had been, to use her particular phraseology, 'a person in her own sphere;' and Mr. Tillott would have thought his chances of success at a very low point, if he could have seen her in Austin Lovel's presence.

That gentleman himself was not slow to perceive the impression he had made.

'It's rather a pity I'm married, isn't it, Clary?' he said to his sister one day, when Sophia, whose habits had not been quite so methodical of late, had gone in search of some white beads for the spaniels, some of which were of a beady nature. 'It would have been a great chance for me, wouldn't it?'

'What do you mean, Austin?'

'Miss Granger,' answered the painter, without looking up from his work. 'I think she rather likes me, do you know; and I suppose her father will give her fifty thousand or so when she marries, in spite of young Lovel. He seems to have no end of money. It would have been an uncommonly good thing, wouldn't it?'

'I don't think it's any use talking of it, Austin, however good it might have been; and I don't think Sophia would have suited you as a wife.'

'Not suited me—bosh! Any woman with fifty thousand pounds would have suited me. However, you're right—there's no good in talking of *that*. I'm booked. Poor little woman, she's a good wife to me; but it's rather a pity. You don't know how many chances I might have had but for that entanglement.'

'I wish, Austin, for your poor wife's sake, you'd let me tell my husband who you are. This conceal-

ment seems so hard upon her, as well as a kind of wrong to Daniel. I can do so little to serve her, and I might do so much, if I could own her as my sister-in-law. I don't think Daniel could help liking you, if he knew everything.'

'Drop that, if you please, Clarissa,' said Austin, with a darkening countenance. 'I have told you that your husband and I can never be friends, and I mean it. I don't want to be degraded by any intercession of yours. *That's* a little too much, even for me. It suits my purpose well enough to accept Mr. Granger's commissions; and of course it's very agreeable to me to see you; but the matter must end there.'

Miss Granger returned at this moment; but had she stayed away for an hour, Clarissa could scarcely have pressed the question farther. In the old days, when they had been boy and girl together, Austin seven years her senior, Clarissa had always been just a little afraid of her brother; and she was afraid of him now.

The very fact of his somewhat dependent position made her more fearful of offending him. She was anxious about his future; anxious too about his present mode of life; but she dared not question him closely upon either subject. Once, when she had ven-

tured to ask him about his plan of life, he answered in his careless offhand way,

'My dearest Clary, I have no plans. I like Paris; and if I am not particularly successful here, I don't suppose I should be more successful anywhere else. I mean to stay here as long as I can hold out. I know a good many people, and sometimes get a stroke of luck.'

'But you are ruining your health, Austin, I fear, with—late hours and—and—parties.'

'Who told you I keep late hours? The Parisians, as a rule, don't go to bed at curfew. I don't suppose I'm worse than my neighbours. If I didn't go out, Clary, and keep myself in the minds of my patrons, I might rot in a garret. You don't know how soon a man is forgotten—even a man who has made his mark more positively than I have; and then you see, my dear, I like society, and have no taste for the domestic hearth, except for variety, once in a way, like dining on a bouillon after a week's high feeding. Yes, come what may, I shall stay in Paris—as long as I can.'

There was something in the tone of the last words that alarmed Clarissa.

'You—you—are not in debt, are you, Austin?' she asked timidly.

'No—no—I'm not in debt; but I owe a good deal of money.'

Clarissa looked puzzled.

'That is to say, I have no vulgar debts—butcher and baker, and so on; but there are two or three things, involving some hundreds, which I shall have to settle some of these days, or else—'

'Or else what, Austin?'

'Cut Paris, Clary; that's all.'

Clarissa turned pale. Austin began to whistle a popular *café-chantant* air, as he bent over his palette, squeezing little dabs of Naples yellow out of a leaden tube. Some hundreds!—that was a vague phrase, which might mean a great deal of money; it was a phrase which alarmed Clarissa; but she was much more alarmed by the recklessness of her brother's tone.

'But if you owe money, you must pay it, Austin,' she said; 'you can't leave a place owing money.'

The painter shrugged his shoulders.

'It's not an agreeable thing to do,' he said; 'but it has been done. Of the two, it's pleasanter than staying in a place where you owe money.'

'Of course I shall do all I can to help you, dear,' said his sister. 'There will be a hundred and twenty-

five pounds due to me at Christmas, and I'll give you the hundred.'

'You're a first-rate girl, Clary; but I think that fellow Granger might give you more pin-money. Five hundred a year is a beggarly pittance for a man of his means.'

'It is more than I fancied I could ever want; and Daniel allows papa five hundred a year, you know, Austin.'

'Humph! that makes a thousand—no great things for a millionaire. A pretty girl, married to a man of that stamp, ought to have unlimited command of money,' replied her brother.—'It's the only compensation,' he said to himself afterwards.

'I don't like to hear you say these things, Austin. My husband is very kind to me. I'm afraid I'm not half as grateful as I ought to be.'

'Gratitude be ——!' He did not finish the ejaculation. 'Gratitude from a Lovel of twenty to a Granger of fifty! My dear Clary, that's too good a joke! The man is well enough—better than I expected to find him; but such a girl as you is a prize for which such a man could not pay too highly.'

It was rarely they had the opportunity for so long a conversation as this; and Austin was by no means

sorry that it was so. He had very pressing need of all the money his sister could give him; but he did not care to enter into explanations about the state of his affairs.

CHAPTER III.

SISTERS-IN-LAW.

Clarissa did not forget the existence of the poor little wife in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard; and on the very first afternoon which she had to herself, Mr. Granger having gone to see some great cattle-fair a few miles from Paris, and Miss Granger being afflicted with a headache, she took courage to order her coachman to drive straight to the house where her brother lived.

'It is much better than making a mystery of it,' she thought. 'The man will think that I have come to see a milliner or some one of that kind.'

The footman would fain have escorted Mrs. Granger the way she should go, and held himself in readiness to accompany her into the house; but she waved him aside on the threshold of the darksome *porte-cochère*, out of which no coach ever came nowadays.

'I sha'n't want you, Trotter,' she said. 'Tell Jarvis to walk the horses gently up and down. I shall not be very long.'

The man bowed and obeyed, wondering what business his mistress could have in such a dingy street, 'on the Surrey side of the water too,' as he said to his comrade.

Austin was out, but Mrs. Lovel was at home, and it was Mrs. Lovel whom Clarissa had come chiefly to see. The same tawdrily-dressed maid admitted her to the same untidy sitting-room, a shade more untidy to-day, where Bessie Lovel was dozing in an easy-chair by the fire, while the two boys played and squabbled in one of the windows.

Mrs. Granger, entering suddenly, radiant in golden-brown moire and sables, seemed almost to dazzle the eyes of Austin's wife, who had not seen much of the brighter side of existence. Her life before her marriage had been altogether sordid and shabby, brightness or luxury of any kind for her class being synonymous with vice; and Bessie Stanford the painter's model had never been vicious. Her life since her marriage had been a life of trouble and difficulty, with only occasional glimpses of a spurious kind of brilliancy. She lived outside her husband's

existence, as it were, and felt somehow that she was only attached to him by external links, as a dog might have been. He had a certain kind of affection for her, was conscious of her fidelity, and grateful for her attachment; and there an end. Sympathy between them there was none; nor had he ever troubled himself to cultivate her tastes, or attempted in the smallest degree to bring her nearer to him. To Bessie Lovel, therefore, this sister of her husband's, in all the glory of her fresh young beauty and sumptuous apparel, seemed a creature of another sphere, something to be gazed upon almost in fear and trembling.

'I beg your parding!' she faltered, rubbing her eyes. She was apt, when agitated, to fall back upon the pronunciation of her girlhood, before Austin Lovel had winced and ejaculated at her various mutilations of the language. 'I was just taking forty winks after my bit of dinner.'

'I am so sorry I disturbed you,' said Clarissa, in her gracious way. 'You were tired, I daresay.'

'O, pray don't mention it! I'm sure I feel it a great compliment your comin'. It must seem a poor place to you after your beautiful house in the Roo de Morny. Austin told me where you lived; and I

took the liberty of walking that way one evening with a lady friend. I'm sure the houses are perfect palaces.'

'I wish you could come to my house as my sister-in-law ought,' replied Clarissa. 'I wanted to confide in my husband, to bring about a friendship between him and my brother, if I could; but Austin tells me that is impossible. I suppose he knows best. So, you see, I am obliged to act in this underhand way, and to come to see you by stealth, as it were.'

'It's very good of you to come at all,' answered the wife with a sigh. 'It isn't many of Austin's friends take any notice of me. I'm sure most of 'em treat me as if I was a cipher. Not that I mind that, provided he could get on; but it's dinners there, and suppers here, and never no orders for pictures, as you may say. He had next to nothing to do all the autumn; Paris being so dull, you know, with all the high people away at the sea. He painted Madame Caballero for nothing, just to get himself talked of among her set; and if it wasn't for Mr. Granger's orders, I don't know where we should be.—Come and speak to your aunt, Henery and Arthur, like good boys.'

This to the olive-branches in the window, strug-

gling for the possession of a battered tin railway-engine with a crooked chimney.

'She ain't my aunt,' cried the eldest hope. 'I haven't got no aunt.'

'Yes, this is your aunt Clarissa. You've heard papa talk of her.'

'Yes, I remember,' said the boy sharply. 'I remember one night when he talked of Arden Court and Clarissa, and thumped his forehead on the mantelpiece like that;' and the boy pantomimed the action of despair.

'He has fits of that kind sometimes,' said Bessie Lovel, 'and goes on about having wasted his life, and thrown away his chances, and all that. He used to go on dreadful when we were in Australia, till he made me that nervous I didn't know what to do, thinking he'd go and destroy himself some day. But he's been better since we've been in Paris. The gaiety suits him. He says he can't live without society.'

Clarissa sighed. Little as she knew of her brother's life, she knew enough to be very sure that love of society had been among the chief causes of his ruin. She took one of her nephews on her lap, and talked to him, and let him play with the trinkets on

her chain. Both the children were bright and intelligent enough, but had that air of premature sharpness which comes from constant intercourse with grown-up people, and an early initiation in the difficulties of existence.

She could only stay half an hour with her sister-in-law; but she could see that her visit of duty had gratified the poor little neglected wife. She had not come empty-handed, but had brought an offering for Bessie Lovel which made the tired eyes brighten with something of their old light—a large oval locket of massive dead gold, with a maltese cross of small diamonds upon it; one of the simplest ornaments which Daniel Granger had given her, and which she fancied herself justified in parting with. She had taken it to a jeweller in the Palais Royal, who had arranged a lock of her dark-brown hair, with a true-lover's knot of brilliants, inside the locket, and had engraved the words 'From Clarissa' on the back.

Mrs. Lovel clasped her hands in rapture as Clarissa opened the morocco case and showed her this jewel.

'For me!' she cried. 'I never had anything half as beautiful in my life. And your 'air, too!' She said ''air' in her excitement. 'How good of

you to give it to me! I don't know how to thank you.'

And the poor little woman made a rapid mental review of her wardrobe, wondering if she had any gown good enough to wear with that splendid jewel. Her purple silk—the one silk dress she possessed—was a little shiny and shabby by daylight, but looked very well by candle-light still, she thought. She was really delighted with the locket. In all her life she had had so few presents; and this one gift was worth three times the sum of them. But Clarissa spoke of it in the lightest, most careless way.

'I wanted to bring you some little souvenir,' she said, 'and I thought you might like this. And now I must say good-bye, Bessie. I may call you Bessie, mayn't I? And remember, you must call me Clarissa. I am sorry I am obliged to hurry away like this; but I expect Mr. Granger back rather early, and I want to be at home when he returns. Good-bye, dear!'

She kissed her brother's wife, who clung to her affectionately, touched by her kindness; kissed the two little nephews also, one of whom caught hold of her dress and said:

'You gave me that money for toys the other day, didn't you, aunt Clarissa?'

'Yes, darling.'

'But I didn't have it to spend, though. Pa said he'd lay it out for me; and he brought me home a cart from the Boulevard; but it didn't cost two napoleons. It was a trumpery cart, that went smash the first time Arthur and I stood in it.'

'You shouldn't stand in a toy-cart, dear. I'll bring you some toys the next time I come to see mamma.'

They were out on the landing by this time. Clarissa disengaged herself from the little fellow, and went quickly down the darksome staircase.

'Will that be soon?' the boy called over the banisters.

'I do hope I shall be able to keep it,' said Bessie Lovel presently, as she stood in the window gloating over her locket; whereby it will be seen that Austin's wife did not feel so secure as she might have done in the possession of her treasure.

CHAPTER IV.

'AND THROUGH THY LIFE HAVE I NOT WRIT MY NAME?'

MID-WINTER had come, and the pleasures and splendours of Paris were at their apogee. The city was at its gayest—that beautiful city, which we can never see again as we have seen it; which we lament, as some fair and radiant creature that has come to an untimely death. Paris the beautiful, Paris the beloved, imperial Paris, with her air of classic splendour, like the mistress of a Cæsar, was in these days overshadowed by no threatening thundercloud, forerunner of the tempest and earthquake to come. The winter season had begun; and all those wanderers who had been basking through the autumn under the blue skies that roof the Pyrenees, or dawdling away existence in German gambling-saloons, or climbing Alpine peaks, or paddling down the Danube, flocked back to the central city of civilisation in time to assist at Patti's reappearance in the Rue Lepelletier, or to applaud a new play of Sardou's at the Gymnase.

Amongst this flock of returning pilgrims came George Fairfax, very much the worse for two or three months spent in restless meanderings between Baden and Hombourg, with the consciousness of a large income at his disposal, and a certain reckless indifference as to which way his life drifted, that had grown upon him of late years.

He met Mr. and Mrs. Granger within twenty-four hours of his arrival in Paris, at a ball at the British embassy—the inaugural fête of the season, as it were, to which the master of Arden Court, by right of his wealth and weight in the North Riding, had been bidden. The ambassadorial card had ignored Miss Granger, much to the damsel's dissatisfaction.

Clarissa came upon Mr. Fairfax unawares in the glazed colonnade upon which the ballroom opened, where he was standing alone, staring moodily at a tall arum lily shooting up from a bed of ferns, when she approached on her partner's arm, taking the regulation promenade after a waltz. The well-remembered profile, which had grown sharper and sterner since she had seen it for the first time, struck her with a sudden thrill, half pleasure, half terror. Yes; she was pleased to see him; she, the wife of Daniel Granger, felt her heart beating faster,

felt a sense of joy strangely mingled with fear. In all the occupations of her life, even amidst the all-absorbing delight of her child's society, she had not been able quite to forget this man. The one voice that had touched her heart, the one face that had haunted her girlish dream, came back to her again and again in spite of herself. In the dead of the night she had started up from her pillow with the sound of George Fairfax's familiar tones in her ears; in too many a dream she had acted over again the meeting in the orchard, and heard his voice upbraiding her, and had seen his face dark and angry in the dim light. She had done her duty to Daniel Granger; but she had not forgotten the man she had loved, and who had loved her after his fashion; and often in her prayers she had entreated that she might never see him again.

Her prayers had not been granted—perhaps they did not come so entirely from the heart, as prayers should, that would fain bring a blessing. He was here; here to remind her how much she had loved him in the days gone by—to bewilder her brain with conflicting thoughts. He turned suddenly from that gloomy contemplation of the arum lily, and met her face to face.

That evening-dress of ours, which has been so liberally abused for its ugliness, is not without a certain charm when worn by a handsome man. A tall man looks taller in the perfect black. The broad expanse of shirt-front, with its delicate embroidery, not obtrusively splendid, but minutely elaborate rather, involving the largest expenditure of needle-work to produce the smallest and vaguest effect—a suspicion of richness, as it were, nothing more; the snowy cambric contrasts with the bronzed visage of the soldier, or blends harmoniously with the fair complexion of the fopling, who has never exposed his countenance to the rough winds of heaven; the expanse of linen proclaims the breadth of chest, and gives a factitious slimness to the waist. Such a costume, relieved perhaps by the flash of some single jewel, not large, but priceless, is scarcely unbecoming, and possibly more æsthetic in its simplicity than the gem-besprinkled brocades and velvets of a Buckingham, in the days when men wore jewelled cloaks on their shoulders, and point d'Alençon flounces round their knees.

George Fairfax, in this evening-dress, looked supremely handsome. It is a poor thing, of course, in man or woman, this beauty; but it has its charm

nevertheless, and in the being who is loved for other and far higher qualities, the charm is tenfold. Few women perhaps have ever fallen in love with a man on account of his good looks; they leave such weak worship for the stronger sex; but having loved him for some other indefinable reason, are not indifferent to the attraction of splendid eyes or a faultless profile.

Clarissa trembled a little as she held out her hand to be clasped in George Fairfax's strong fingers, the quiet pressure whereof seemed to say, 'You *know* that you and I are something more to each other than the world supposes.'

She could not meet him without betraying, by some faint sign, that there was neither forgetfulness nor indifference in her mind as to the things that concerned him.

Her late partner—a youthful secretary of legation, with straw-coloured hair and an incipient moustache—murmured something civil, and slid away, leaving those two alone beside the arum lily, or as much alone as they could be in a place, where the guests were circulating freely, and about half-a-dozen flirtations ripening amidst the shining foliage of orange-trees and camellias.

'I thought I should meet you here to-night,' he said. 'I came here in the hope of meeting you.'

She was not an experienced woman of the world, skilled in the art of warding off such a speech as this. She had never flirted in her life, and sorely felt the want of that facility which comes from long practice.

'Have you seen my husband?' she asked, awkwardly enough, in her distress.

'I did not come to see Mr. Granger. It was the hope of seeing you that brought me here. I am as great a fool as I was at Hale Castle, you see, Clarissa. There are some follies of which a man cannot cure himself.'

'Mr. Fairfax!'

She looked up at him gravely, reproachfully, with as much anger as she could bring herself to feel against him; but as their eyes met, something in his—a look that told too plainly of passion and daring—made her eyelids fall, and she stood before him trembling like a frightened child. And this moment was perhaps the turning-point in Clarissa's life—the moment in which she took the first step on the wrong road that was to lead her so far away from the sacred paths of innocence and peace.

George Fairfax drew her hand through his arm—she had neither strength nor resolution to oppose him—and led her away to the quietest corner of the colonnade—a recess sheltered by orange-trees, and provided with a rustic bench.

There is no need to record every word that was spoken there; it was the old story of a man's selfish guilty love, and a woman's sinful weakness. He spoke, and Clarissa heard him, not willingly, but with faint efforts of resistance that ended in nothing. She heard him. Never again could she meet Daniel Granger's honest gaze as she had done—never, it seemed to her, could she lose the sense of her sin.

He told her how she had ruined his life. That was his chief reproach, and a reproach that a woman can rarely hear unmoved. He painted in the briefest words the picture of what he might have been, and what he was. If his life were wrecked utterly—and from his own account of himself it must needs be so—the wreck was her fault. He had been ready to sacrifice everything for her. She had basely cheated him.

His upbraiding stung her too keenly; she could keep her secret no longer.

'I had promised Laura Armstrong,' she said—'I

had promised her that no power on earth should tempt me to marry you—if you should ask me.'

'You had promised!' he cried contemptuously. 'Promised that shallow trickster! I might have known she had a hand in my misery. And you thought a promise to her more sacred than good faith to me? That was hard, Clarissa.'

'It was hard,' she answered, in a heart-broken voice.

'My God!' he cried, looking at her with those passionate eyes, 'and yet you loved me all the time?'

'With all my heart,' she faltered, and then hid her face in her hands.

It seemed as if the confession had been wrung from her somehow. In the next moment she hated herself for having said the words, and calming herself with a great effort, said to him quietly,

'And now that you know how weak I was, when I seemed indifferent to you, have pity upon me, Mr. Fairfax.'

'Pity!' he exclaimed. 'It is not a question of pity; it is a question of two lives that have been blighted through your foolish submission to that plotting woman. But there must be some recompense to be found in the future for all the tortures of the

past. I have broken every tie for your sake, Clarissa; you must make some sacrifice for me.'

Clarissa looked at him wonderingly. Was he so mad as to suppose that she was of the stuff that makes runaway wives?

'Your father tempted my mother, Mr. Fairfax,' she said, 'but I thank Heaven she escaped him. The rôle of seducer seems hereditary in your family. You could not make me break my word when I was free to marry you; do you believe that you can make me false to my husband?'

'Yes, Clarissa. I swore as much that night in the orchard—swore that I would win you, in spite of the world.'

'And my son,' she said, with the tone she might have used if he had been one-and-twenty, 'is he to blush for his mother by and by?'

'I have never found that sons have a faculty for blushing on account of that kind of thing,' Mr. Fairfax answered lightly.—'Egad, there'd be a great deal of blushing going on at some of the crack clubs if they had!' he said to himself afterwards.

Clarissa rose from the seat amongst the orange-trees, and George Fairfax did not attempt to detain her.

He offered her his arm to conduct her back to the ball-room; they had been quite long enough away. He did not want to attract attention; and he had said as much as he cared to say.

He felt very sure of his ground now. She loved him—that was the all-important point. His wounded self-esteem was solaced by this knowledge. His old sense of power came back to him. He had felt himself all at sea, as it were, when he believed it possible that any woman he cared to win could be indifferent to him.

From the other side of the ball-room Mr. Granger saw his wife reënter arm-in-arm with George Fairfax. The sight gave him a little shock. He had hoped that young man was far enough away, ruining himself in a fashionable manner somehow; and here he was in attendance upon Clarissa. He remembered how his daughter had said that George Fairfax was sure to meet them in Paris, and his own anger at the suggestion. He would be obliged to be civil to the young man, of course. There was no reason indeed that he should be otherwise than civil—only that lurking terror in his mind, that this was the man his wife had loved. *Had* loved? is there any past tense to that verb?

Mrs. Granger dropped Mr. Fairfax's arm directly they came to a vacant seat.

'I am rather tired,' she said, in her coldest voice. 'I think I'll rest a little, if you please. I needn't detain you. I daresay you are engaged for the next dance.'

'No. I seldom dance.'

He stood by her side. One rapid glance across the room had shown him Daniel Granger making his way towards them, looking unspeakably ponderous and British amidst that butterfly crowd. He did not mean to leave her just yet, in spite of her proprietor's approach. She belonged to him, he told himself, by right of that confession just now in the conservatory. It was only a question when he should take her to himself. He felt like some bold rover of the seas, who has just captured a gallant craft, and carries her proudly over the ocean chained to his gloomy hull.

She was his, he told himself; but before he could carry her away from her present surroundings he must play the base part which he had once thought he never could play. He must be civil to Daniel Granger, mask his batteries, win his footing in the household, so that he might have easy access to the

woman he loved, until one day the thunderbolt would descend, and an honest man be left desolate, 'with his household gods shattered.' It was just one of those sins that will not bear contemplation. George Fairfax was fain to shut his eyes upon the horror and vileness of it, and only to say to himself doggedly, 'I have sworn to win her.'

Mr. Granger greeted him civilly enough presently, and with the stereotyped cordiality which may mean anything or nothing. Was Mr. Fairfax going to remain long in Paris? Yes, he meant to winter there, if nothing better turned up.

'After all, you see,' he said, 'there is no place like Paris. One gets tired of it, of course, in time; but I find that in other places one is always tired.'

'A very pleasant ball,' remarked Mr. Granger, with the air of saying something original. 'You have been dancing, I suppose?'

'No,' replied Mr. Fairfax, smiling; 'I have come into my property. I don't dance. "I range myself," as our friends here say.'

He thought, as he spoke, of sundry breakneck gallops and mahlstrom waltzes danced in gardens and saloons, the very existence whereof was ignored by or unknown to respectability; and then thought, 'If I

were safely planted on the other side of the world with *her* for my wife, it would cost me no more to cut all that kind of thing than it would to throw away a handful of withered flowers.'

CHAPTER V.

STOLEN HOURS.

Miss Granger's portrait was finished; and the baby-picture — a chubby blue-eyed cherub, at play on a bank of primroses, with a yellowhammer perched on a blossoming blackthorn above his head, and just a glimpse of blue April sky beyond; a dainty little study of colour, in which the painter had surpassed himself—was making rapid progress, to the young mother's intense delight. Very soon Mr. Austin would have no longer the privilege of coming every other day to the Rue de Morny. Daniel Granger had declined sitting for his portrait.

'I did it once,' he said. 'The Bradford people insisted upon making me a present of my own likeness, life-size, with my brown cob, Peter Pindar, standing beside me. I was obliged to hang the picture in the hall at Arden—those good fellows would have been wounded if I hadn't given it a prominent

position; but that great shining brown cob plays the mischief with my finest Velasquez, a portrait of Don Carlos Baltazar, in white satin slashed with crimson. No; I like your easy, dashing style very much, Mr. Austin; but one portrait in a lifetime is quite enough for me.'

As the Granger family became more acclimatised, as it were, Clarissa found herself with more time at her disposal. Sophia had attached herself to a little clique of English ladies, and had her own engagements and her separate interests. Clarissa's friends were for the most part Frenchwomen, whom she had known in London, or to whom she had been introduced by Lady Laura. Mr. Granger had his own set, and spent his afternoons agreeably enough, drinking soda water, reading *Galignani*, and talking commerce or politics with his compeers at the most respectable café on the Boulevards. Being free therefore to dispose of her afternoons, Clarissa, when Lovel's picture was finished, went naturally to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard. Having once taken her servants there, she had no farther scruples.

'They will think I come to see a dressmaker,' she said to herself. But in this she did not give those domestic officers credit for the sharpness of their

class. Before she had been three times to her brother's lodgings, John Thomas, the footman, had contrived—despite his utter ignorance of the French tongue—to discover who were the occupants of No. 7, and had ascertained that Mr. Austin, the painter, was one of them.

'Who'd have thought of her coming to see that chap Hostin?' said John Thomas to the coachman. 'That's a rum start, ain't it?'

'Life is made up of rum starts, John Thomas,' replied the coachman sententiously. 'Is there a Mrs. Hostin, do you know?'

'Yes, he's got a wife. I found that out from the porter, though the blessed old buffer can't speak anything but his French gibberish. "Madame?" I said, bawling into his stupid old ear. "Mossoo and Madame Hostin? comprenny?" and he says, "Ya-ase," and then bursts out laughing, and looks as proud as a hen that's just laid a hegg—"Ya-ase, Mossoo et Madame."'

George Fairfax and Clarissa met very frequently after that ball at the Embassy. It happened that they knew the same people; Mr. Fairfax, indeed, knew every one worth knowing in Paris; and he seemed to have grown suddenly fond of respectable

society, going everywhere in the hope of meeting Mrs. Granger, and rarely staying long anywhere, if he did not meet her. There were those who observed this peculiarity in his movements, and shrugged their shoulders significantly. It was to be expected, of course, said this butterfly section of humanity: a beautiful young woman, married to a man old enough to be her father, would naturally have some one interested in her.

Sometimes Clarissa met George Fairfax in her brother's painting-room; so often, indeed, that she scarcely cared to keep an account of these meeetings. Austin knew a good many clever agreeable Americans and Frenchmen, and his room was a pleasant lounge for idle young men, with some interest in art, and plenty to say upon every subject in the universe. If there were strangers in the painting-room when Mrs. Granger came to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard, she remained in the little salon, talking to her sister-in-law and the two precocious nephews; but it happened generally that George Fairfax, by some mysterious means, became aware of her presence, and one of the folding-doors would open presently, and the tall figure appear.

'Those fellows have fairly smoked me out, Mrs.

Austin,' he would say.—'Ah, how do you do, Mrs. Granger? I hope you'll excuse any odour of Victorias and Patagas I may bring with me. Your brother's Yankee friends smoke like so many peripatetic furnaces.'

And then he would plant himself against a corner of the mantelpiece, and remain a fixture till Clarissa departed. It was half an hour's talk that was almost a tête-à-tête. Bessie Lovel counted for so little between those two. Half an hour of dangerous happiness, which made all the rest of Mrs. Granger's life seem dull and colourless; the thought of which even came between her and her child.

Sometimes she resolved that she would go no more to that shabby street on the 'Surrey side;' but the resolve was always broken. Either Austin had asked her to come for some special reason, or the poor little wife had begged some favour of her, which required personal attention; there was always something.

Those were pleasant afternoons, when the painting-room was empty of strangers, and Clarissa sat in a low chair by the fire, while George Fairfax and her brother talked. Austin was never so brilliant as in George's company; the two men suited each other,

had lived in the same world, and loved the same things. They talked of all things in heaven and earth, touching lightly upon all, and with a careless kind of eloquence that had an especial fascination for the listener. It seemed as if she had scarcely lived in the dull interval between those charmed days at Hale Castle and these hours of perilous delight; as if she had been half-stifled by the atmosphere of common-sense which had pervaded her existence—crushed and borne down by the weight of Daniel Granger's sober companionship. *This* was fairyland—a region of enchantment, full of bright thoughts and pleasant fancies; *that* a dismal level drill-ground, upon which all the world marched in solid squares, to the monotonous cry of a sergeant-major's word of command. One may ride through a world of weariness in a barouche-and-pair. Clarissa had not found her husband's wealth by any means a perennial source of happiness, nor even the possession of Arden an unfailing consolation.

It was strange how this untidy painting-room of Austin's, with its tawdry dilapidated furniture—all of which had struck her with a sense of shabbiness and dreariness at first—had grown to possess a charm for her. In the winter gloaming, when the low wood

fire glowed redly on the hearth, and made a flickering light upon the walls, the room had a certain picturesque aspect. The bulky Flemish cabinets, with their coarse florid carving, stood boldly out from the background, with red gleams from the fire reflected on chubby cherub heads and mediæval monsters. The faded curtains lost their look of poverty, and had only the sombre air of age; an old brass chandelier of the Louis Quatorze period, which Austin had hung in the centre of his room, flashed and glittered in the uncertain light; and those two figures —one leaning against the mantelpiece, the other prowling restlessly to and fro as he talked, carrying a mahl-stick, which he waved ever and anon like the rod of a magician—completed the picture. It was a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes in the great world of art, a peep into Bohemia; and O, how much brighter a region it seemed to Clarissa than that well-regulated world in which she dined every day at the same hour, with four solemn men watching the banquet, and wound up always with the same dismal quarter of an hour's sitting in state at dessert!

Those stolen hours in Austin's painting-room had too keen a fascination for her. Again and again she told herself that she would come no more, and

yet she came. She was so secure of her own integrity, so fenced and defended by womanly pride, that she argued with herself there could be neither sin nor danger in these happy respites from the commonplace dreariness of her life. And yet, so inconsistent is human nature, there were times when this woman flung herself upon the ground beside her baby's crib, and prayed God to pardon her iniquities.

Austin was much too careless to be conscious of his sister's danger. George Fairfax had made an afternoon lounge of his rooms in the previous winter; it was no new thing for him to come there three or four times a week; and Austin did not for a moment suspect that Clarissa's occasional presence had anything to do with these visits.

When the three portraits were finished, Mr. Granger expressed himself highly content with them, and gave Austin Lovel a cheque for three hundred pounds; a sum which, in the painter's own words, ought to have set him upon his legs. Unhappily Austin's legs, from a financial point of view, afforded only the most insecure basis—were always slipping away from him, in fact. Three hundred pounds in solid cash did not suffice for even his most pressing

needs. He saw nothing before him but the necessity of an ignominious flight from Paris. It was only a question of when and where he should fly; there was no question as to the fact.

He did not care to tell Clarissa this, however. It would be time enough when the thing was done, or just about to be done. All his life he had been in the habit of shirking unpleasant subjects, and he meant to shirk this as long as he could. He might have borrowed money of George Fairfax, no doubt; but unfortunately he was already in that gentleman's debt, for money borrowed during the previous winter; so he scarcely cared to make any new appeal in that quarter.

So the unsubstantial Bohemian existence went on; and to Clarissa, for whom this Bohemia was an utterly new world, it seemed the only life worth living. Her brother had been pleased to discover the ripening of her artistic powers, and had given her some rough-and-ready lessons in the art she loved so well. Sometimes, on a bright wintry morning, when Mr. Granger was engaged out of doors, she brought her portfolio to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard, and painted there for an hour or so. At first this had been a secure hour for unreserved talk

with her brother; but after she had been there two or three mornings in this way, Mr. Fairfax seemed mysteriously aware of her movements, and happened to drop in while she was taking her lesson.

It is not to be supposed that Clarissa could be so much away from home without attracting the attention of Miss Granger. Whether that young lady was at home or abroad, she contrived to keep herself always well informed as to the movements of her stepmother. She speculated, and wondered, and puzzled herself a good deal about these frequent outings; and finding Clarissa singularly reticent upon the subject, grew daily more curious and suspicious; until at last she could endure the burden of this perplexity no longer, without some relief in words, and was fain to take the judicious Warman into her confidence.

'Has Mrs. Granger been out again this afternoon, Warman?' she asked one evening, when the handmaiden was dressing her hair for dinner.

'Yes, miss. The carriage came home just now. I heard it. Mrs. Granger went out almost directly after you did.'

'I wonder she can care to waste so much time in calls,' said Sophia.

'Yes, miss, it is odd; and almost always the same place too, as you may say. But I suppose Mrs. Granger was intimate with Mr. and Mrs. Austin before her marriage.'

'Mr. and Mrs. Austin! What do you mean, Warman?'

'Lor', miss, I thought you would know where she went, as a matter of course. It seems only natural you should. I've heard Jarvis mention it at supper. Jarvis has his meals at *our* table, you know, miss. "We've been to the Rue du Cavalier Barnard again to-day," he says, "which I suppose is French for Barnard's-inn. Missus and them Austins must be very thick." Jarvis has no manners, you know, miss; and that's just his uncultivated way of speaking. But from what I've heard him remark, I'm sure Mrs. Granger goes to call upon the Austins as much as three times a week, and seldom stops less than an hour.'

A deadly coldness had crept over Sophia Granger —a cold blank feeling, which had never come upon her until that moment. He had a wife, then, that dashing young painter with the brilliant brown eyes —the only man who had ever aroused the faintest interest in her well-regulated soul. He was married,

and any vague day-dream with which she had interwoven his image was the merest delusion and phantasmagoria. She was unspeakably angry with herself for this unworthy weakness. A painter—a person paid by her father—something less than a curate—if it was possible for any creature to seem less than Mr. Tillott in Sophia's estimation. He was a married man—a base impostor, who had sailed under false colours—a very pirate. All those graceful airy compliments, those delicate attentions, which had exercised such a subtle influence over her narrow mind—had, indeed, awakened in her something that was almost sentiment—were worse than meaningless, were the wiles of an adventurer trading on her folly.

'He wanted to paint papa's picture,' she thought, 'and I suppose he fancied my influence might help him.'

But what of Clarissa's visits to the painter's lodgings? what possible reason could she have for going there? Miss Granger's suspicions were shapeless and intangible as yet, but she did suspect. More than once—many times, in fact—during the painting of the portrait, she had seen, or had imagined she could see, signs and tokens of a closer

intimacy between the painter and her father's wife than was warranted by their ostensible acquaintance. The circumstances were slight enough in themselves, but these fragile links welded together made a chain which would have been good enough evidence in a criminal court, skilfully handled by an Old Bailey lawyer. Sophia Granger racked her brains to account for this suspected intimacy. When and where had these two been friends, lovers perhaps? Mr. Austin had been away from England for many years, if his own statement were to be believed. It must have been abroad, therefore, that Clarissa had known him —in her school-days. He had been drawing-master, perhaps, in the seminary at Belforêt. What more likely?

Miss Granger cherished the peculiar British idea of all foreign schools, that they were more or less sinks of iniquity. A flirtation between drawing-master and pupil would be a small thing in such a pernicious atmosphere. Even amidst the Arcadian innocence of native academies such weeds have flourished. This flirtation, springing up in foreign soil, would be of course ten times more desperate, secret, jesuitical in fact, than any purely English product.

Yes, Miss Granger decided at the end of every silent debate in which she argued this question with herself—yes, that was the word of the enigma. These two had been lovers in the days that were gone; and meeting again, both married, they were more than half lovers still.

Clarissa made some excuse to see her old admirer frequently. She was taking lessons in painting, perhaps. Miss Granger observed that she painted more than usual lately—merely for the sake of seeing him.

And how about George Fairfax? Well, that flirtation, of course, was of later date and a less serious affair. Jealousy—a new kind of jealousy, more bitter even than that which she had felt when Clarissa came between her and her father—sharpened Miss Granger's suspicions in this case. She was jealous even of that supposed flirtation at Belforêt, four or five years ago. She was angry with Clarissa for having once possessed this man's heart; ready to suspect her of any baseness in the past, any treason in the present.

The Grangers were at Madame Caballero's two or three evenings after this revelation of Warman's, and Sophia had an opportunity of gleaning some

scraps of information from the good-natured little lion-huntress. Madame had been asking her if Mr. Austin's portraits had been a success.

'Yes; papa thinks they are excellent, and talks about having them exhibited in the salon. Mr. Austin is really very clever. Do you know, I was not aware that he was married, till the other day?' Sophia added, with a careless air.

'Indeed! Yes, there is a wife, I understand; but she never goes into society; no one hears of her. For my part I think him charming.'

'Has he been long in Paris?'

Madame Caballero shrugged her shoulders. 'I don't know,' she said. 'I have only known of his existence since he became famous—in a small way—a very small way, of course. He exhibited some military sketches, which attracted the attention of a friend of mine, who talked to me about him. I said at once, "Bring him here. I can appreciate every order of genius, from Ary Scheffer to Gavarni." The young man came, and I was delighted with him. I admitted him among my intimates; and he insisted on painting the picture which your papa was good enough to admire.'

'Do you know how he lived before he came into

notice—if he has ever been a drawing-master, for instance?'

'I know that he has given lessons. I have heard him complain of the drudgery of teaching.'

This sustained Miss Granger's theory. It seemed so likely. No other hypothesis presented itself to her mind.

Day by day she watched and waited and speculated, hearing of all Clarissa's movements from the obsequious Warman, who took care to question Mrs. Granger's coachman in the course of conversation, in a pleasant casual manner, as to the places to which he had taken his mistress. She waited and made no sign. There was treason going on. The climax and explosion would come in good time.

In the mean while, Clarissa seemed almost entirely free. Mr. Granger, after living for nearly fifty years of his life utterly unaffected by feminine influence, was not a man to hang upon his wife's footsteps or to hold her bound to his side. If she had returned his affection with equal measure, if that sympathy for which he sighed in secret could have arisen between them, he might have been as devoted a slave as love could make an honest man. As it was, his married life at its best was a disappointment. Only

in the fond hopes and airy visions which his son had inspired, did he find the happiness he had dreamt of when he first tried to win Clarissa for his wife. Here alone, in his love for his child, was there a pure and perfect joy. All other dreams ended in bitter waking. His wife had never loved him, never would love him. She was grateful for his affection, obedient, submissive; her grace and beauty gave him a reflected lustre in society. She was a creature to be proud of, and he was proud of her; but she did not love him. And with this thought there came always a sudden agony of jealousy. If not him, what other had she loved? Whose image reigned in the heart so closely shut against him? Who was that man, the mere memory of whom was more to her than the whole sum of her husband's devotion?

CHAPTER VI.

'FROM CLARISSA.'

THAT jewel which Clarissa had given to Bessie Lovel was a treasure of price, the very possession whereof was always an oppressive joy to the poor little woman, whose chief knowledge of life came from the experience of its debts and difficulties. That the massive gold locket with the diamond cross would be required of her sooner or later, to be handed into the ruthless paw of a clerk at the *mont de piété*, she had little doubt. Everything that she or her husband had ever possessed worth possessing had so vanished—had been not an absolute property, but a brief fleeting joy, a kind of supernal visitant, vanishing anon into nothingness, or only a pawnbroker's duplicate. The time would come. She showed the trinket to her husband with a melancholy foreboding, and read his thoughts as he weighed it in his palm, by mere force

of habit, speculating what it would fetch, if in his desperate needs this waif might serve him.

She was not surprised, therefore—only a little distressed—when Austin broached the subject one day at his late breakfast—that breakfast at which it needed nearly a bottle of claret to wash down three or four mouthfuls of savoury pie, or half a tiny cutlet. She had possessed the bauble more than a month, holding it in fear and trembling, and only astonished that it had not been demanded of her.

'O, by the way, Bess,' Austin Lovel said carelessly, 'I was abominably unlucky last night, at Madame Caballero's. I'm generally lugged in for a game or two at écarté *there*, you know. One can't refuse in a house of that kind. And I had been doing wonders. They were betting on my game, and I stood to win something handsome, when the luck changed all in a moment. The fellow I was playing against marked the king three times running; and, in short, I rose a considerable loser—considerable for me, that is to say. I told my antagonist I should send him the money to-day. He's a kind of man I can't afford to trifle with; and you know the Caballero connection is of too much use to be jeopardised. So I've been thinking, Bess, that if you'd let me have that gim-

crack locket my sister gave you, I could raise a tenner on it. Clary can afford to give you plenty of such things, even if it were lost, which it need not be.'

Of course not. Mrs. Lovel had been told as much about the little Geneva watch which her husband had given her a few days after her marriage, and had taken away from her six weeks later. But the watch had never come back to her. She gave a faint sigh of resignation. It was not within the compass of her mind to oppose him.

'We shall never get on while you play cards, Austin,' she said sadly.

'My dear Bessie, a man may win as well as lose. You see, when I go into society there are certain things expected of me; and my only chance of getting on is by making myself agreeable to the people whose influence is worth having.'

'But I can't see that card-playing leads to your getting commissions for pictures, Austin, no more than horseracing nor billiards. It all seems to end the same—in your losing money.'

The painter pushed away his plate with an impatient gesture. He was taking his breakfast in his painting-room, hours after the family meal, Bessie waiting upon him, and cobbling some juvenile gar-

ment during the intervals of her attendance. He pushed his plate aside, and got up to pace the room in the restless way that was common to him on such occasions.

'My dear child, if you don't want to give me the locket, say so,' he said, 'but don't treat me to a sermon. You can keep it if you like, though I can't conceive what use the thing can be to you. It's not a thing you can wear.'

'Not at home, dear, certainly; and I never go out,' the wife answered, with the faintest touch of reproachfulness. 'I am very fond of it, though, for your sister's sake. It was so kind of her to bring it to me, and such a new thing for me to have a present. But you are welcome to it, Austin, if you really want it.'

'If I really want it! Do you suppose I should be mean enough to ask you for it if I didn't? I shouldn't so much care about it, you see, only I am to meet the man to-morrow evening at dinner, and I can't face him without the money. So if you'll look the thing out some time to-day, Bess, I'll take it down to the Quai between this and to-morrow afternoon, and get the business over.'

Thus it was that George Fairfax, strolling into

Mrs. Lovel's sitting-room that afternoon while Austin was out, happened to find her seated in a pensive attitude, with an open work-box before her and Clarissa's locket in her hand. It was a shabby battered old box, but had been for years the repository of all Bessie's treasures.

She had kept the locket there, looking at it very often, and wondering if she would ever be able to wear it—if Austin would take her to a theatre, for instance, or give a little dinner at home instead of abroad, for once in a way, to some of the men whose society absorbed so much of his time.

There was no hope of this now. Once gone from her hands, the treasure would return no more. She knew that very well, and was indulging her grief by a farewell contemplation of the trinket, when Mr. Fairfax came into the room.

The flash of the diamonds caught his quick eye.

'What a pretty locket you've got there, Mrs. Austin!' he said, as he shook hands with her. 'A new-year's gift from Austin, I suppose.'

'No, it was my sister-in-law, Mrs. Granger, who gave it me,' Bessie answered, with a sigh.

He was interested in it immediately, but was careful not to betray his interest. Mrs. Lovel put it

into his hands. She was proud of it even in this last hour of possession. 'Perhaps you'd like to look at it,' she said. 'It's got her 'air inside.'

Yes, there was a circlet of the dark brown hair he knew so well, and the two words, 'From Clarissa.'

'Upon my word, it's very handsome,' he said, looking at the diamond cross outside, but thinking of the love-lock within. 'I never saw a locket I liked better. You are very fond of it, I daresay?' he added interrogatively.

'O, yes, I like it very much! I can't bear to part with it.'

And here Bessie Lovel, not being gifted with the power of concealing her emotions, fairly broke down and cried like a child.

'My dear Mrs. Austin,' exclaimed George Fairfaix, 'pray don't distress yourself like that. Part with it? Why should you part with your locket?'

'O, Mr. Fairfax, I oughtn't to have told you—Austin would be so angry if he knew—but he has been losing money at that horrid ecarty, and he says he must have ten pounds to-morrow; so my beautiful locket must go to the pawnbroker's.'

George Fairfax paused. His first impulse was to lend the poor little woman the money—the veriest

trifle, of course, to the lord of Lyvedon. But the next moment another idea presented itself to him. He had the locket lying in the open palm of his hand. It would be so sweet to possess that lock of hair—to wear so dear a token of his mistress. Even those two words, 'From Clarissa,' had a kind of magic for him. It was a foolish weakness, of course; but then love is made up of such follies.

'If you really mean to part with this,' he said, 'I should be very glad to have it. I would give you more than any pawnbroker — say, twenty instead of ten pounds, for instance—and a new locket for yourself into the bargain. I shouldn't like to deprive you of an ornament you valued without some kind of compensation. I have taken a fancy to the design of the thing, and should really like to have it. What do you say now, Mrs. Austin—shall that be a transaction between you and me, without any reference to your husband, who might be angry with you for having let me into domestic secrets? You can tell him you got the money from the *mont de piété*. Look here, now; let's settle the business at once.'

He opened his purse, and tumbled the contents out upon the table. Bessie Lovel thought what a blessed state of existence that must be in which

people walked this world with all that ready money about them.

'There are just four-and-twenty pounds here,' he said cheerily; 'so we'll say four-and-twenty.'

He saw that she was yielding.

'And would you really give me a locket for myself,' she said, almost incredulously, 'as well as this money?'

'Unquestionably. As good a one as I can find in the Rue de la Paix. This has diamonds, and that shall have diamonds. It's the design, you see,' he added persuasively, 'that has taken my fancy.'

'I'm sure you are very generous,' Bessie murmured, still hesitating.

'Generous! Pshaw, not at all. It's a caprice; and I shall consider myself under an obligation to you if you gratify it.'

The temptation was irresistible. To obtain the money that was required—more than double the sum her husband had wanted—and to have another locket as well! Never, surely, had there been such a bargain since the famous magician offered new lamps for old ones. Of course, it was only Mr. Fairfax's delicate way of doing them a kindness; his fancy for the locket was merely a benevolent pretence. What

could he care for that particular trinket; he who might, so to speak, walk knee-deep in diamonds, if he pleased?

She took the twenty-four pounds—an English ten-pound note, and the rest in new glittering napoleons—and then began to speculate upon the possibility of giving Austin twenty pounds, and appropriating the balance to her own uses. The children wanted so many things—that perpetual want of the juvenile population above all, shoe-leather; and might she not even screw some cheap dress for herself out of the sum? while if it were all given to Austin, it would vanish, like smoke before the wind, leaving no trace behind.

So George Fairfax put the bauble in his waistcoat-pocket, and whatever sentimental pleasure might be derived from such a talisman was his. There are those among our disciples of modern magic who believe there is a subtle animal magnetism in such things; that the mere possession of such a token constitutes a kind of spiritual link between two beings. Mr. Fairfax had no such fancy; but it pleased him to have obtained that which no prayers of his could have won from Clarissa herself. Not at present, that is to say. It would all come in good time.

She loved him; secure of that one fact, he believed all the rest a mere question of patience and constancy.

'And she is worth the winning,' he said to himself. 'A man might serve for a longer slavery than Jacob's, and yet be rewarded by such a conquest. I think, by the way, that Rachel must have been just a trifle faded when the patriarch was out of his time.'

He dawdled away an hour or so in Bessie's salon —telling the poor little woman the news of the day, and playing with the two boys, who regarded him as a beneficent being, from whose hands flowed perpetual toys and sweetmeats. He waited as long as he could without making his motive obvious; waited, in the hope that Clarissa would come; and then, as there was no sign of her coming, and Austin was still out, he wished Bessie good-bye.

'I sha'n't forget the locket,' he said, as he departed.

Austin came in five minutes afterwards. The boys had been scuttled off to take their evening meal in the kitchen—a darksome cupboard about eight feet square—where the tawdry servant was perpetually stewing savoury messes upon a small charcoal stove.

Bessie handed her husband the ten-pound note, and twelve bright napoleons.

'Why, what's this?' he asked.

'The—the money for the locket, Austin. I thought you might be late home; so I ran round to the Quai with it myself. And I asked for twenty pounds, and the man gave it to me.'

'Why, that's a brave girl!' cried Austin, kissing the pleading face uplifted to his. 'I don't believe they'd have given me as much. An English tenner, though; that's odd!' he added carelessly, and then slipped the cash loose into his pocket, with the air of a man for whom money is at best a temporary possession.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT IS WHAT LOVE MEANS.

The Grangers and Mr. Fairfax went on meeting in society; and Daniel Granger, with whom it was a kind of habit to ask men to dinner, could hardly avoid inviting George Fairfax. It might have seemed invidious to do so; and for what reason should he make such a distinction? Even to himself Mr. Granger would not be willing to confess that he was jealous of this man. So Mr. Fairfax came with others of his species to the gorgeous caravanserai in the Rue de Morny, where the rooms never by any chance looked as if people lived in them, but rather as if they were waiting-rooms at some railway station, got up with temporary splendour for the reception of royalty.

He came; and though Clarissa sometimes made feeble efforts to avoid him, it happened almost always, that before the evening was out he found some few

minutes for unreserved talk with her. There is little need to record such brief stolen interviews—a few hurried words by the piano, a sentence or two in a lowered voice at parting. There was not much in the words perhaps—only very common words, that have done duty between thousands of men and women—a kind of signal code, as it were; and yet they had power to poison Clarissa's life, to take the sweetness out of every joy, even a mother's innocent idolatry of her child.

The words were spoken; but so carefully did George Fairfax play his part, that not even Sophia's sharp eyes could perceive more than was correct in the conduct of her stepmother. No, she told herself, that other flirtation was the desperate one. Clarissa might have had some preference for George Fairfax; there had been occasional indications of such a feeling in her manner at Hale Castle; but the dark spot of her life, the secret of her girlhood, was a love affair with Mr. Austin.

By way of experiment, one day she asked her father's wife a question about the painter.

'You seemed to admire Mr. Austin very much, Clarissa,' she said, 'and I admit that he is remarkably clever; but he appears such a waif and stray.

In all his conversation with us he never threw much light upon his own history. Do you know anything of his antecedents?'

Clarissa blushed in spite of herself. The deception she had sustained so long was unspeakably distasteful to her. Again and again she had been tempted to hazard everything, and acknowledge Austin as her brother, whether he liked or not that she should do so. It was only his peremptory tone that had kept her silent.

'What should I know of his antecedents more than you, Sophy?' she said, avoiding a more direct reply. 'It is quite enough for me to know that he has undeniable genius.'

The blush, and a certain warmth in her tone, seemed to Sophia conclusive evidence of her hidden regard for this man. Miss Granger's heart beat a good deal faster than usual, and little jealous sparkles shone in her cold gray eyes. She had never admired any man so much as she had admired this brilliant young painter. Many men had paid her compliments; as the rich Mr. Granger's sole daughter and heiress, she had been gratified with no meagre share of mankind's worship; but no words ever spoken had sounded so sweet in her ears as those few civil

speeches that Mr. Austin had found time to address to her during his visits to the Rue de Morny. And after having taken so much pleasure in his converse, and thought so much more about him than she would have considered it proper for any model villager to think about an individual of the opposite sex, it was a hard thing to find—first, that the base impostor had a wife; and secondly, that whatever illegitimate worship he might have to render, was to be offered at the shrine of Clarissa.

'Indeed!' she exclaimed, with an air of extreme surprise. 'You seemed on such very friendly terms with him, that I fancied you must really have known each other before, and that you had some motive for concealing the fact from papa.'

Clarissa blushed a deeper crimson at this home-thrust, and bent a little lower over her drawing-board. It seemed a fortunate thing that she happened to be painting when Miss Granger opened her guns upon her in this manner.

'He gives lessons, I believe; does he not?' asked Sophia.

'Yes—I—I believe—I have heard so.'

'Do you know, I took it into my head that he might have been your drawing-master at Belforêt.'

Clarissa laughed aloud at this suggestion. Miss Granger's persistent curiosity amused her a little, dangerous as the ground was.

'O dear no, he was not our master at Belforêt,' she said. 'We had a little old Swiss—such an ancient, ancient man—who took snuff continually, and was always talking about his *pays natal* and Jean Jacques Rousseau. I think he had known Rousseau; and I am sure he was old enough to remember the night they locked him out of Geneva.'

Sophia was fairly posed; she had been on a false scent evidently, and yet she was sure there was something. That is how she shaped her doubts in her own mind—there was *something*. Warman thought so, she knew; and Warman was gifted with no ordinary amount of penetration.

So Mrs. Granger went her way, with suspicion around and about her, and danger ahead. Whatever peace had been hers in the brief period of her married life—and the quiet spring-time and summer that came after her baby's birth had been very peaceful—had vanished now. A cloud of fear encompassed her; a constant melancholy possessed her; a pleading voice, which she ought never to have heard, was always in her ears—a voice that charged her with the

burden of a broken life—a voice that told her it was only by some sacrifice of her own she could atone for the sacrifice that had been made for her—a too persuasive voice, with a perilous charm in its every accent.

She loved him. That she could ever be weak enough, or vile enough, to sink into that dread abyss, whereto some women have gone down for the love of man, was not within the compass of her thought. But she knew that no day in her life was sinless now; that no pure and innocent joys were left to her; that her every thought of George Fairfax was a sin against her husband.

And yet she went on loving him. Sometimes, when the sense of her guilt was strongest, she would fain have asked her husband to take her back to Arden; which must needs be a kind of sanctuary, as it were, she thought. Nay, hardly so; for even in that tranquil retreat Temple Fairfax had contrived to pursue her mother, with the poison of his influence and his presence. Very often she felt inclined to ask her husband this favour; but she could not do so without running some risk of betraying herself—Heaven knows how much she might betray—unawares. Again, their sojourn in the Rue de Morny

was not to endure for ever. Already Mr. Granger had expressed himself somewhat tired of Paris; indeed, what denizen of that brilliant city does not become a little weary of its brightness, sooner or later, and fall sick of the Boulevard-fever — a harassing sense of all-pervading glare and confusion, a sensation of Paris on the brain?

There was some talk of returning to Arden at the end of a month. They were now at the close of January; by the first of March Mr. Granger hoped to be at the Court. His architect and his head-bailiff were alike eager for his return; there were more pullings down and reconstructions required on the new estate; there were all manner of recondite experiments to be tried in scientific farming; there were new leases to be granted, and expiring leases, the covenants whereof must be exacted.

Since they were likely to leave Paris so soon, it would be foolish to excite wonder by asking to leave sooner, Mrs. Granger thought. It mattered so little, after all, she told herself sometimes. It mattered this much only—that day by day her feet were straying farther from the right road.

O those happy winter afternoons in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard! Such innocent happiness, too, in

all seeming—only a little animated rambling talk upon all manner of subjects, from the loftiest problems in philosophy to the frothiest gossip of the Faubourg St. Honoré; only the presence of two people who loved each other to distraction. A dim firelit room; a little commonplace woman coming in and out; two young men disputing in the dusk; and Clarissa in her low chair by the fire, listening to the magical voice that was now the only music of her dreams. If it could have gone on for ever thus—a sweet sentimental friendship like that which linked Madame Roland and Brissot, Madame Recamier and Chateaubriand — there would surely have been no harm, Clarissa sometimes argued with herself. She was married to a man whom she could respect for many qualities of his heart and mind, against whom she could never seriously offend. Was it so great a sin if the friendship of George Fairfax was dear to her? if the few happy hours of her life were those she spent in his company? But such special pleading as this was the poorest sophistry; at heart she was conscious that it was so. A woman has a double conscience, as it were—a holy of holies within the temple of her mind, to which falsehood cannot enter. She may refuse to lift the screen, and meet the truth

face to face; but it is there—not to be extinguished —eternal, immutable; the divine lamp given for her guidance, if only she will not withdraw herself from its light.

Just a little less than a month before his intended departure, Mr. Granger had a letter from that exacting bailiff, entreating his return. Something in the scientific farming had gone wrong; some great sewage question was at issue, and none but the lord of the soil himself could settle the matter. Very dear to Daniel Granger were those lands of Arden, that Arden-Court estate which he had made to spread itself so far over the face of the county. Sweet are ancestral domains, no doubt; dear by association, made holy by the pride of race; but perhaps sweeter to the soul of man are those acres he has won by the work of his own strong hand, or his own steadfast brain. Next to his wife and children, in Mr. Granger's regard, were the lands of Arden: the farms and homesteads, in valleys and on hill-tops; the cottages and school-houses, which he had built for the improvement of his species; the bran-new slack-baked gothic church in an outlying village, where a church had never been before his coming.

He was very sorry to leave his wife; but the question at stake was an important one. If he could have carried his household away with him at an hour's notice, he would gladly have done so; but to move Clarissa, and the nurse, and the baby, and Miss Granger, would be rather a formidable business —in fact, a thing not to be done without elaborate preparation. He had the apartments in the Rue de Morny on his hands, too, until the beginning of March; and even a millionaire seldom cares to waste such a rental as Parisian proprietors exact for house-room in the fashionable quarter. So he decided upon going to Arden at once—which was essential—and returning directly he had adjusted matters with his bailiff, and done a morning's work with his architect.

He told Clarissa of his intention one evening when they had returned from a dinner-party, and she was seated before her dressing-table, taking off her jewels in a slow absent way. She looked up with a start as her husband came into the room, and planted himself on the white sheepskin rug, with his back against the mantelpiece.

'I am obliged to go back to Yorkshire, Clary,' he said.

She thought he meant they were all going back

— that it was an interposition of Providence, and she was to be taken away from sin and danger. But O, how hard it seemed to go — never again to look forward to those stolen twilights in her brother's painting-room!

'I am glad!' she exclaimed. 'I shall be very glad to go back to Arden.'

'You, my dear!' said her husband; 'it is only I who am going. There is some hitch in our experiments on the home farm, and Forley knows how anxious I am about making a success this year. So he wants me to run over and see to things; he won't accept the responsibility of carrying on any longer without me. I needn't be away above two or three days, or a week at most. You can get on very well without me.'

Clarissa was silent, looking down at a bracelet which she was turning idly round her arm. Get on without him! Alas, what part had Daniel Granger played in her life of late beyond that of some supernumerary king in a stage-play?—a person of importance by rank and title in the play-bill, but of scarcely any significance to the story. Her guilty heart told her how little he had ever been to her; how, day by day, he had been growing less and less. And while

he was away, she might go to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard every day. There would be nothing to prevent her so doing, if she pleased. The carriage was nominally and actually hers. There was a brougham at Miss Granger's disposal; but the landau was essentially Clarissa's carriage.

'You can get on very well without me,' repeated Mr. Granger. 'I do not think my presence or absence makes very much difference to you, Clarissa,' he added, in a grave displeased tone.

It was almost his first hint of a reproach. To his wife's guilty heart it struck sharply home, like an unexpected blow. She looked up at him with a pale conscience-stricken face, in which he might have read much more than he did read there. He only thought that he had spoken a shade too severely—that he had wounded her.

'I—I don't know what you mean by that,' she faltered helplessly. 'I always try to please you.'

'Try to please me!' he repeated passionately. 'Yes, Clary, as a child tries to please a schoolmaster. Do you know, that when I married you I was mad enough to hope the day would come when you would love me—that you loved me a little even then? Do you know how I have waited for that day, and have

learned to understand, little by little, that it never can dawn for me upon this earth? You are my wife, and the mother of my child; and yet, God knows, you are no nearer to me than the day I first saw you at Hale Castle—a slim girlish figure in a white dress, coming in at the door of the library. Not a whit nearer,' he went on, to himself rather than to Clarissa; 'but so much more dear.'

There was a passion in his words which touched his wife. If it had only been possible for her to love him! if gratitude and respect, joined together, could have made up the sum of love! But they could not. She knew that George Fairfax was in all moral qualities this man's inferior; yet for some indefinable charm, some trick of tone or manner, some curious magic in a smile or a glance, she loved him.

She was silent. Perhaps the sense of her guilt came more fully home to her in this moment than it had ever done before. What words could she speak to bring comfort to her husband's soul—she whose whole life was a lie?

Daniel Granger wandered up and down the room for some minutes in a vague restless way, and then came to his wife's chair, and looked down at her very tenderly.

'My dear, I do wrong to worry you with reproaches,' he said. 'The mistake has been mine. From first to last, I have been to blame. I suppose in the wisest life there must always be some folly. Mine has been the hope that I could win your love. It is gone now, Clarissa; it is quite gone. Not even my child has given me a place in your heart.'

She looked up at him again, with that look which expressed such a depth of remorse.

'I am very wicked,' she said; 'I am utterly unworthy of all you have done for me. It would have been better for you never to have seen my face.'

'Wicked! no, Clary. Your only sin has been to have disappointed a foolish fancy. What right had I to suppose you loved me? Better never to have seen your face?—yes, perhaps that might have been better. But, once having seen you, I would rather be wretched with you than happy with any other woman in the world. That is what love means, Clary.'

He stooped down to kiss her.

'Say no more, dear,' he said. 'I never meant to speak as I have spoken to-night. I love you for ever.'

The day came when she remembered those words, 'I love you for ever.'

If she could have thrown herself upon his breast

and acknowledged all her weakness, beseeching him to shield her from herself, in obedience to the impulse of that moment, what a world of anguish might have been spared to these two! But she let the impulse pass, and kept silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

LYING IN WAIT.

Mr. Granger went back to Yorkshire; and Clarissa's days were at her own disposal. They were to leave Paris at the beginning of March. She knew it was only for a very short time that she would be able to see her brother. It was scarcely natural, therefore, that she should neglect such an opportunity as this. There was so much in Austin's life that caused her uneasiness; he seemed in such sore need of wiser counsel than his poor empty-headed little wife could give him; and Clarissa believed that she had some influence with him: that if he would be governed by the advice of any creature upon earth, that counsellor was herself.

So she spent her mornings in baby-worship, and went every afternoon to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard, where it happened curiously that Mr. Fairfax came

even oftener than usual just at this time. In the evening she stayed at home—not caring to keep her engagements in society without her husband's escort —and resigned herself to the edifying companionship of Miss Granger, who was eloquent upon the benighted condition of the Parisian poor as compared with her model villagers. She described them sententiously as a people who put garlic in everything they ate, and never read their Bibles.

'One woman showed me a book with little pictures of saints printed upon paper with lace edges,' said Sophia, 'as if there were any edification to be derived from lace edges; and such a heathen book, too—Latin on one side and French on the other. And there the poor forsaken creatures sit in their churches, looking at stray pictures and hearing a service in an unknown tongue.'

Daniel Granger had been away nearly a week; and as yet there was no announcement of his return; only brief business-like letters, telling Clarissa that the drainage question was a complicated one, and he should remain upon the spot till he and Forley could see their way out of the difficulty. He had been away nearly a week, when George Fairfax went to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard at the usual hour, expecting to

find Austin Lovel standing before his easel with a cigar in his mouth, and Clarissa sitting in the low chair by the fire, in the attitude he knew so well, with the red glow of the embers lighting up gleams of colour in her dark velvet dress, and shining on the soft brown hair crowned with a coquettish little seal-skin hat—a *toque*, as they called it on that side of the Channel.

What was his astonishment to find a pile of trunks and portmanteaus on the landing, Austin's easel roughly packed for removal, and a heap of that miscellaneous lumber without which even poverty cannot shift its dwelling! The door was open; and Mr. Fairfax walked straight into the sitting-room, where the two boys were eating some extemporised meal at a side-table under their mother's supervision; while Austin lounged with his back against the chimney-piece, smoking. He was a man who would have smoked during the culminating convulsions of an earthquake.

'Why, Austin, what the—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Austin—what *does* this mean?'

'It means Brussels by the three-fifteen train, my dear Fairfax, that's all.'

'Brussels? With those children and that lug-

gage? What, in Heaven's name, induces you to carry your family off like this, at an hour's notice?'

'It is not an hour's notice; they've had an hour and three-quarters. As to my reasons for this abrupt hegira—well, that involves rather a long story; and I haven't time to tell it to-day. One thing is pretty clear—I can't live in Paris. Perhaps I may be able to live in Brussels. I can't very well do worse than I've done here—that's *one* comfort.'

At this Bessie Lovel began to cry—in a suppressed kind of way, like a woman who is accustomed to cry and not to be taken much notice of. George Fairfax flung himself into a chair with an impatient gesture. He was at once sorry for this man and angry with him; vexed to see any man go to ruin with such an utter recklessness, with such a deliberate casting away of every chance that might have redeemed him.

'You have got into some scrape, I suppose,' he said presently.

'Got into a scrape!' cried Austin with a laugh, tossing away the end of one cigar and preparing to light another. 'My normal condition is that of being in a scrape. Egad! I fancy I must have been born so.—For God's sake don't whimper, Bessie, if you

want to catch the three-fifteen train! *I* go by that, remember, whoever stays behind.—There's no occasion to enter into explanations, Fairfax. If you could help me I'd ask you to do it, in spite of former obligations; but you can't. I have got into a difficulty —pecuniary, of course; and as the law of liability in this city happens to be a trifle more stringent than our amiable British code, I have no alternative but to bid good-bye to the towers of Notre Dame. I love the dear disreputable city, with her lights and laughter, and music and mirth; but she loves not me.—When those boys have done gorging themselves, Bessie, you had better put on your bonnet.'

His wife cast an appealing glance at George Fairfax, as if she felt she had a friend in him who would sustain her in any argument with her husband. Her face was very sad, and bore the traces of many tears.

'If you would only tell me why we are going, Austin,' she pleaded, 'I could bear it so much better.'

'Nonsense, child! Would anything I could tell you alter the fact that we *are* going? Pshaw, Bessie! why make a fuss about trifles? The packing is over: that was the grand difficulty, I thought. I told you we could manage that.'

'It seems so hard—running away like criminals.'

Austin Lovel's countenance darkened a little.

'I can go alone,' he said.

'No, no,' cried the wife piteously: 'I'll go with you. I don't want to vex you, Austin. Haven't I shared everything with you—everything? I would go with you if it was to prison—if it was to death. You know that.'

'I know that we shall lose the three-fifteen train if you don't put on your bonnet.'

'Very well, Austin; I'm going. And Clarissa—what will she think of us? I'm so sorry to leave her.'

'O, by the way, George,' said Austin, 'you might manage that business for me. My sister was to be here at five o'clock this afternoon. I've written her a letter telling her of the change in my plans. She was in some measure prepared for my leaving Paris; but not quite so suddenly as this. I was going to send the letter by a commissionnaire; but if you don't mind taking it to the Rue de Morny, I'd rather trust it to you. I don't want Clary to come here and find empty rooms.'

He took a sealed letter from the mantelpiece and handed it to George Fairfax, who received it with

somewhat of a dreamy air, as of a man who does not quite understand the mission that is intrusted to him. It was a simple business enough, too—only the delivery of a letter.

Mrs. Lovel came out of the adjoining room dressed for the journey, and carrying a collection of wraps for the children. It was wonderful to behold what comforters, and scarves, and gaiters, and muffetees those juvenile individuals required for their equipment.

'Such a long cold journey!' the anxious mother exclaimed, and went on winding up the two children in woollen stuffs, as if they had been royal mummies. She pushed little papers of sandwiches into their pockets—sandwiches that would hardly be improved by the squeezing and sitting upon they must needs undergo in the transit.

When this was done, and the children ready, she looked into the painting-room with a melancholy air.

'Think of all the furniture, Austin,' she exclaimed; 'the cabinets and things!'

'Yes; there's a considerable amount of money wasted there, Bess; for I don't suppose we shall ever see the things again; but there's a good many of them not paid for. There's comfort in that reflection.'

'You take everything so lightly,' she said with a hopeless sigh.

'There's nothing between that and the Morgue, my dear. You'd scarcely like to see me framed and glazed *there*, I think.'

'O, Austin!'

'Precisely. So let me take things lightly, while I can. Now, Bess, the time is up. Good-bye, George.'

'I'll come down-stairs with you,' said Mr. Fairfax, still in a somewhat dreamy state. He had put Austin's letter into his pocket, and was standing at a window looking down into the street, which had about as much life or traffic for a man to stare at as some of the lateral streets in the Bloomsbury district —Caroline-place, for instance, or Keppel-street.

There was a great struggling and bumping of porters and coachman on the stairs, with a good deal more exclamation than would have proceeded from stalwart Englishmen under the same circumstances; and then Austin went down to the coach with his wife and children, followed by George Fairfax. The painter happened not to be in debt to his landlord—a gentleman who gave his tenants small grace at any time; so there was no difficulty about the departure.

'I'll write to Monsieur Meriste about my furniture,' he said to the guardian of the big dreary mansion. 'You may as well come to the station with us, George,' he added, looking at Mr. Fairfax, who stood irresolute on the pavement, while Bessie and the boys were being packed into the vehicle, the roof of which was laden with portmanteaus and the painter's 'plant.'

'Well—no; I think not. There's this letter to be delivered, you see. I had better do that at once.'

'True; Clarissa might come. She said five o'clock, though; but it doesn't matter. Good-bye, old fellow. I hope some of these days I may be able to make things square with you. Good-bye. Tell Clary I shall write to her from Brussels, under cover to the maid as usual.'

He called out to the coachman to go on; and the carriage drove off, staggering under its load. George Fairfax stood watching it till it was out of sight, and then turned to the porter.

'Those rooms up-stairs will be to let, I suppose?' he said.

'But certainly, monsieur.'

'I have some thoughts of taking them for—for a friend. I'll just take another look round them now

they're empty. And perhaps you wouldn't mind my writing a letter up-stairs—eh ?'

He slipped a napoleon into the man's hand—by no means the first that he had given him. New-Year's day was not far past; and the porter remembered that Mr. Fairfax had tipped him more liberally than some of the lodgers in the house. If monsieur had a legion of letters to write, he was at liberty to write them. The rooms up yonder were entirely at his disposal; the porter laid them at his feet, as it were. He might have occupied them rent-free for the remainder of his existence, it would have been supposed from the man's manner.

'If madame, the sister of Monsieur Austin, should come by and by, you will permit her to ascend,' said Mr. Fairfax. 'I have a message for her from her brother.'

'Assuredly, monsieur.'

The porter retired into his den to meditate upon his good fortune. It was a rendezvous, of course, cunningly arranged on the day of the painter's departure. It seemed to him like a leaf out of one of those flabby novels on large paper, with a muddy wood-cut on every sixteenth page, which he thumbed and pored over now and then of an evening.

George Fairfax went up-stairs. How supremely dismal the rooms looked in their emptiness, with the litter of packing lying about!—old boots and shoes in one corner; a broken parasol in another; battered fragments of toys everywhere; empty colour-tubes; old newspapers and magazines; a regiment of empty oil-flasks and wine-bottles in the den of a kitchen—into which Mr. Fairfax peered curiously, out of very weariness. It was only half-past three; and there was little hope of Clarissa's arrival until five. He meant to meet her there. In the moment that Austin put the letter in his hand some such notion flashed into his mind. He had never intended to deliver the letter. How long he had waited for this chance—to see her alone, free from all fear of interruption, and to be able to tell his story and plead his cause, as he felt that he could plead!

He walked up and down the empty painting-room, thinking of her coming, meditating what he should say, acting the scene over in his brain. He had little fear as to the issue. Secure as she seemed in the panoply of her woman's pride, he knew his power, and fancied that it needed only time and opportunity to win her. This was not the first time he had counted his chances and arranged his plan of action.

In the hour he first heard of her marriage he had resolved to win her. Outraged love transformed itself into a passion that was something akin to revenge. He scarcely cared how low he might bring her, so long as he won her for his own. He did not stop to consider whether hers was a mind which could endure dishonour. He knew that she loved him, and that her married life had been made unhappy because of this fatal love.

'I will open the doors of her prison-house,' he said to himself, 'poor fettered soul! She shall leave that dreary conventional life, with its forms and ceremonies of pleasure; and we will wander all over the earth together, only to linger wherever this world is brightest. What can she lose by the exchange? Not wealth. For the command of all that makes life delightful, I am as rich a man as Daniel Granger, and anything beyond that is a barren surplus. Not position; for what position has she as Mrs. Granger? I will take her away from all the people who ever knew her, and guard her jealously from the hazard of shame. There will only be a couple of years in her life which she will have to blot out—only a leaf torn out of her history.'

And the child? the blue-eyed boy that George

Fairfax had stopped to kiss in Arden Park that day? It is one thing to contemplate stealing a wife from her husband—with George Fairfax's class there is a natural antipathy to husbands, which makes that seem a fair warfare, like fox-hunting—but it is another to rob a child of its mother. Mr. Fairfax's meditations came to a standstill at this point—the boy blocked the line.

There was only one thing to be done; put on the steam, and run down the obstacle, as Isambard Brunel did in the Box-tunnel, when he saw a stray luggage-truck between him and the light.

'Let her bring the boy with her, and he shall be my son,' he thought.

Daniel Granger would go in for a divorce, of course. Mr. Fairfax thought of everything in that hour and a half of solitary reflection. He would try for a divorce, and there would be no end of scandal—leading articles in some of the papers, no doubt, upon the immorality of the upper middle classes; a full-flavoured essay in the *Saturday*, proving that Englishwomen were in the habit of running away from their husbands. But *she* should be far away from the bruit of that scandal. He would make it the business of his life to shield her from the lightest

breath of insult. It could be done. There were new worlds, in which men and women could begin a fresh existence, under new names; and if by chance any denizen of the old world should cross their path untimely—well, such unwelcome wanderers are generally open to negotiation. There is a good deal of charity for such offenders among the travelled classes, especially when the chief sinner is lord of such an estate as Lyvedon.

Yet, varnish the picture how one will, dress up the story with what flowers of fancy one may, it is at best but a patched and broken business. The varnish brings out dark spots in the picture; the flowers have a faded meretricious look, not the bloom and dew of the garden; no sophistry can overcome the inherent ugliness of the thing — an honest man's name dishonoured; two culprits planning a future life, to be spent in hiding from the more respectable portion of their species; two outcasts, trying to make believe that the wildernesses beyond Eden are fairer than that paradise itself.

His mother—what would she feel when she came to know what he had done with his life? It would be a disappointment to her, of course; a grief, no doubt; but she would have Lyvedon. He had gone

too far to be influenced by any consideration of that kind; he had gone so far that life without Clarissa seemed to him unendurable. He paced the room, contemplating this crisis of his existence from every point of view, till the gray winter sky grew darker, and the time of Clarissa's coming drew very near. There had been some logs smouldering on the hearth when he came, and these he had replenished from time to time. The glow of the fire was the only thing that relieved the dreariness of the room.

Nothing could be more fortunate, he fancied, than the accident which had brought about this meeting. Daniel Granger was away. The flight, which was to be the preface of Clarissa's new existence, could not take place too soon; no time need be wasted on preparations, which could only serve to betray. Her consent once gained, he had only to put her into a hackney-coach and drive to the Marseilles station. Why should they not start that very night? There was a train that left Paris at seven, he knew; in three days they might be on the shores of the Adriatic.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. GRANGER'S WELCOME HOME.

Clarissa left the Rue de Morny at three o'clock that day. She had a round of calls to make, and for that reason had postponed her visit to her brother's painting-room to a later hour than usual. The solemn dinner, which she shared with Miss Granger in stately solitude, took place at half-past seven, until which hour she considered her time at her own disposal.

Sophia spent that particular afternoon at home, illuminating the new gothic texts for her schoolrooms at Arden. She had been seated at her work about an hour after Clarissa's departure, when the door opened behind her, and her father walked into the room.

There had been no word of his return in his latest letter; he had only said generally in a previous epistle, that he should come back directly the

business that had called him to Yorkshire was settled.

'Good gracious me, papa, how you startled me!' cried Miss Granger, dabbing at a spot of ultramarine which had fallen upon her work. It was not a very warm welcome; but when she had made the best she could of that unlucky blue spot, she laid down her brush and came over to her father, to whom she offered a rather chilly kiss. 'You must be very tired, papa,' she remarked, with striking originality.

'Well, no; not exactly tired. We had a very fair passage; but the journey from Calais is tedious. It seems as if Calais oughtn't to be any farther from Paris than Dover is from London. There's something lop-sided in it. I read the papers all the way. Where's Clary?'

'Clarissa has gone to pay some visits.'

'Why didn't you go with her?'

'I rarely do go with her, papa. Our sets are quite different; and I have other duties.'

'Duties, pshaw! Messing with those paint-brushes; you don't call that duty, I hope? You had much better have gone out with your step-mother.'

'I was not wanted, papa. Mrs. Granger has

engagements which do not in the least concern me. I should only be in the way.'

'What do you mean by that, Sophia?' asked her father sternly. 'And what do you mean by calling my wife Mrs. Granger?'

'There are some people so uncongenial to each other, papa, that any pretence of friendship can be only the vilest hypocrisy,' replied Sophia, turning very pale, and looking her father full in the face, like a person prepared to do battle.

'I am very sorry to hear this, Sophia,' said Mr. Granger; 'for if this is really the case, it will be necessary for you to seek some other home. I will have no one in my house who cannot value my wife.'

'You would turn me out of doors, papa?'

'I should certainly endeavour to provide you with a more congenial—congenial, that was the word you used, I think—a more congenial home.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Sophia. 'Then I suppose you quite approve of all my stepmother's conduct—of her frequent, almost daily visits to such a person as Mr. Austin?'

'Clarissa's visits to Austin! What, in heaven's name, do you mean?'

'What, papa! is it possible you are ignorant of the fact? I thought that, though my stepmother never talked to *me* of her visits to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard, you of course knew all about them. Though I hardly supposed you would encourage such an intimacy.'

'Encourage such an intimacy! You must be dreaming, girl. My wife visit a portrait-painter—a single man?'

'He is not a single man, papa. There is a wife, I understand; though he never mentioned her to us. And Clarissa visits them almost every day.'

'I don't believe it. What motive could she have for cultivating such people?'

'I can't imagine—except that she is fond of that kind of society, and of painting. She may have gone to take lessons of Mr. Austin. He teaches, I know.'

Daniel Granger was silent. It was not impossible; and it would have been no crime on his wife's part, of course. But the idea that Clarissa could have done such a thing without his knowledge and approval, offended him beyond measure. He could hardly realise the possibility of such an act.

'There is some misapprehension on your part,

Sophia, I am convinced,' he said. 'If Clarissa had wished to take drawing lessons from Austin, she would have told me so.'

'There is no possibility of a mistake on my part, papa. I am not in the habit of making statements which I cannot support.'

'Who told you of these visits? Clarissa herself?'

'O dear, no; Clarissa is not in the habit of telling me her affairs. I heard it from Warman; not in reply to any questioning of mine, I can assure you. But the thing has been so frequent, that the servants have begun to talk about it. Of course, *I* always make a point of discouraging any speculations upon my stepmother's conduct.'

The servants had begun to talk; his wife's intimacy with people of whom he knew scarcely anything had been going on so long as to provoke the gossip of the household; and he had heard nothing of it until this moment! The thought stung him to the quick. That domestic slander should have been busy with her name already; that she should have lived her own life so entirely without reference to him! Both thoughts were alike bitter. Yet it was no new thing for him to know that she did not love him.

He looked at his watch meditatively.

'Has she gone there this afternoon, do you think?' he asked.

'I think it is excessively probable. Warman tells me she has been there every afternoon during your absence.'

'She must have taken a strange fancy to these people. Austin's wife is some old schoolfellow of Clary's, perhaps.'

Miss Granger shook her head doubtfully.

'I should hardly think that,' she said.

'There must be some reason—something that we cannot understand. She may have some delicacy about talking to me of these people; there may be something in their circumstances to—'

'Yes,' said Miss Granger, 'there is *something*, no doubt. I have been assured of that from the first.'

'What did you say the address was?'

'The Rue du Chevalier Bayard, Number 7.'

Mr. Granger left the room without another word. He was not a man to remain long in doubt upon any question that could be solved by prompt investigation. He went out into the hall, where a footman sat reading *Galignani* in the lamplight.

'Has Mrs. Granger's carriage come back, Saunders?' he asked.

'Yes, sir; the carriage has been back a quarter of an hour. I were out with my mistress.'

'Where is Mrs. Granger? In her own rooms?'

'No, sir; Mrs. Granger didn't come home in the carriage. We drove her to the Shangs Elysy first, sir, and afterwards to the Rue du Cavalier Baynard; and Mr. Fairfax, he came down and told me my mistress wouldn't want the carriage to take her home.'

'Mr. Fairfax—in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard!'

'Yes, sir; he's an intimate friend of Mr. Hostin's, I believe. Leastways, we've seen him there very often.'

George Fairfax! George Fairfax a frequent guest of these people whom she visited! That slumbering demon, which had been sheltered in Daniel Granger's breast so long, arose rampant at the sound of this name. George Fairfax, the man he suspected in the past; the man whom he had done his best to keep out of his wife's pathway in the present, but who, by some fatality, was not to be avoided. Had Clarissa cultivated an intimacy with

this Bohemian painter and his wife only for the sake of meeting George Fairfax without her husband's knowledge? To suppose this was to imagine a depth of depravity in the heart of the woman he loved. And he had believed her so pure, so noble a creature. The blow was heavy. He stood looking at his servant for a moment or so, paralysed; but except that one blank gaze, he gave no sign of his emotion. He only took up his hat, and went quietly out. 'His looks was orful!' the man said afterwards in the servants' hall.

Sophia came out of the drawing-room to look for her father, just a little disturbed by the thought of what she had done. She had gone too far, perhaps. There had been something in her father's look when he asked her for that address that had alarmed her. He was gone; gone *there*, no doubt, to discover his wife's motives for those strange visits. Miss Granger's heart was not often fluttered as it was this evening. She could not 'settle to anything,' as she said herself, but wandered up into the nursery, and stood by the dainty little cot, staring absently at her baby brother as he slept.

'If anything should happen,' she thought—and

that event which she vaguely foreshadowed was one that would leave the child motherless—'I should make it *my* duty to superintend his rearing. No one should have power to say that I was jealous of the brother who has robbed me of my heritage.'

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

It was dusk when Clarissa's carriage drove into the Rue du Chevalier Bayard—the dull gray gloaming of February—and the great bell of Notre Dame was booming five. She had been paying visits of duty, talking banalities in fashionable drawing-rooms, and she was weary. She seemed to breathe a new life as she approached her brother's dwelling. Here there would be the free reckless utterance of minds that harmonised, of souls that sympathised:—instead of stereotyped little scraps of gossip about the great world, or arid discussion of new plays and famous opera-singers.

She did not stop to ask any questions of the complacent porter. It was not her habit to do so. She had never yet failed to find Austin, or Austin's wife, at home at this hour. She went swiftly up the darksome staircase, where never a lamp was

lighted to illumine the stranger, only an occasional candle thrust out of a doorway by some friendly hand. In the dusk of this particular evening there was not so much as a glimmer.

The outer door was ajar—not such an uncommon thing as to occasion any surprise to Clarissa. She pushed it open and went in, across a dingy lobby some four feet square, on which abutted the kitchen, and into the salon. This was dark and empty; but one of the folding-doors leading into the painting-room was open, and she saw the warm glow of the fire shining on the old Flemish cabinets and the brazen chandelier. That glow of firelight had a comfortable look after the desolation and darkness of the salon.

She went into the painting-room. There was a tall figure standing by one of the windows, looming gigantic through the dusk—a figure she knew very well, but not Austin's. She looked quickly round the room, expecting to see her brother lounging by the chimneypiece, or wandering about somewhere in his desultory way; but there was no one else, only that tall figure by the window.

The silence and emptiness of the place, and *his* presence, startled her a little.

'Good-evening, Mr. Fairfax,' she said. 'Isn't Austin here?'

'Not at this moment. How do you do, Mrs. Granger?' and they shook hands. So commonplace a meeting might almost have disappointed the sentimental porter.

'And Bessie?' Clarissa asked.

'She too is out of the way for the moment,' replied George Fairfax, glancing out of the window. 'You came in your carriage, I suppose, Mrs. Granger? If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll just run and see if — if Austin has come in again.'

He went quickly out of the room and downstairs, not to look for Austin Lovel, who was on his way to Brussels by this time, but to tell Mrs. Granger's coachman she had no farther use for the carriage, and would not be home to dinner. The man looked a little surprised at this order, but Mr. Fairfax's tone was too peremptory to be unauthorised; so he drove homeward without hesitation.

Clarissa was seated in her favourite easy-chair, looking pensively at the wood-fire, when George Fairfax came back. She heard his returning footsteps, and the sharp click of a key turning in the

outer door. This sound set her wondering. What door was that being locked, and by whom?

Mr. Fairfax came into the painting-room. It was the crisis of his life, he told himself. If he failed to obtain some promise from her to-night—some definite pledge of his future happiness—he could never hope to succeed.

'Time and I against any two,' he had said to himself sometimes in relation to this business. He had been content to bide his time; but the golden opportunity had come at last. If he failed to-night, he failed for ever.

'Is he coming?' Clarissa asked, rather anxiously. There was something ominous in the stillness of the place, and the absence of any sign of life except George Fairfax's presence.

'Not immediately. Don't alarm yourself,' he said hurriedly, as Clarissa rose with a frightened look. 'There is nothing really wrong, only there are circumstances that I felt it better to break to you gently. Yet I fear I am an awkward hand at doing that, at the best. The fact is, your brother has left Paris.'

'Left Paris!'

'Yes, only a couple of hours ago.' And then

Mr. Fairfax went on to tell the story of Austin's departure, making as light of it as he could, and with no word of that letter which had been given him to deliver.

The news was a shock to Clarissa. Very well did she remember what her brother had told her about the probability of his being compelled to 'cut Paris.' It had come, then, some new disgrace, and banished him from the city he loved — the city in which his talents had won for him a budding reputation, that might have blossomed into fame, if he had only been a wiser and a better man. She heard George Fairfax in silence, her head bowed with shame. This man was her brother, and she loved him so dearly.

'Do you know where they have gone?' she asked at last.

'To Brussels. He may do very well there, no doubt, if he will only keep himself steady—turn his back upon the rackety society he is so fond of—and work honestly at his art. It is a place where they can live more cheaply, too, than they could here.'

'I am so sorry they are gone without a word of parting. It must have been very sudden.'

'Yes. I believe the necessity for the journey arose quite suddenly; or it may have been hanging over your brother for a long time, and he may have shut his eyes to the fact until the last moment. He is such a fellow for taking things easily. However, he did not enter into explanations with me.'

'Poor Austin! What a wretched life!'

Clarissa rose and moved slowly towards the folding-doors. George Fairfax stopped her at the threshold, and quietly closed the door.

'Don't go yet, Clarissa. I want to speak to you.'

His tone told her what was coming—the scene in the conservatory was to be acted over again. This was the first time they had been actually alone since that too-well-remembered night.

She drew herself up haughtily. A woman's weakness makes her desperate in such a case as this.

'I have no time to talk now, Mr. Fairfax. I am going home.'

'Not yet, Clarissa. I have waited a long time for this chance. I am determined to say my say.'

'You will not compel me to listen to you?'

'Compel is a very hard word. I beseech you to

hear me. My future life depends on what I have to say, and on your answer.'

'I cannot hear a word! I will not remain a moment!'

'The door yonder is locked, Clarissa, and the key in my pocket. Brutal, you will say. The circumstances of our lives have left me no option. I have watched and waited for such an opportunity as this; and now, Clarissa, you shall hear me. Do you remember that night in the orchard, when you drove me away by your coldness and obstinacy? And yet you loved me! You have owned it since. Ah, my darling, how I have hated myself for my dulness that night!—hated myself for not having seized you in my arms, if need were, and carried you off to the end of the world to make you my wife. What a fool and craven I must have been to be put off so easily!'

'Nothing can be more foolish than to discuss the past, Mr. Fairfax,' replied Clarissa, in a low voice that trembled a little. 'You have made me do wrong more than once in my life. There must be an end of this. What would my husband think, if he could hear you? what would he think of me for listening to you? Let me pass, if you please; and

God grant that we may never meet again after to-night!'

'God grant that we may never part, Clarissa! O, my love, my love, for pity's sake be reasonable! We are not children to play fast and loose with our lives. You love me, Clary. No sweet-spoken pretences, no stereotyped denials, will convince me. You love me, my darling, and the world is all before us. I have mapped-out our future; no sorrow or discredit shall ever come nigh you—trust a lover's foresight for that. Whatever difficulties may lie in our pathway are difficulties that I will face and conquer—alone. You have only to forget that you have ever been Daniel Granger's wife, and leave Paris with me to-night.'

'Mr. Fairfax! are you mad?'

'Never more reasonable—never so much in earnest. Come with me, Clarissa. It is not a sacrifice that I ask from you: I offer you a release. Do you think there is any virtue or beauty in your present life, or any merit in continuing it? From first to last, your existence is a lie. Do you think a wedding-ring redeems the honour of a woman who sells herself for money? There is no slavery more degrading than the bondage of such an alliance.'

'Open the door, Mr. Fairfax, and let me go!'

His reproaches stung her to the quick; they were so bitterly true.

'Not till you have heard me, my darling—not till you have heard me out.'

His tone changed all at once, softening into ineffable tenderness. He told her of his love with words of deeper passion than he had ever spoken yet—words that went home to the heart that loved him. For a moment, listening to that impassioned pleading, it seemed to Clarissa that this verily was life indeed—that to be so loved was in itself alone the perfect joy and fulness of existence, leaving nothing more to be desired, making shame as nothing in the balance. In that one moment the guilty heart was well-nigh yielding; the bewildered brain could scarcely maintain the conflict of thought and feeling. Then suddenly this mental agony changed to a strange dulness, a mist rose between Clarissa and the eager face of her lover. She was nearer fainting than she had ever been in her life before.

George Fairfax saw her face whiten, and the slender figure totter ever so slightly. In a moment a strong arm was round her. The weary head sank on his shoulder.

'My darling,' he whispered, 'why not leave Paris to-night? It cannot be too soon. Your husband is away. We shall have a start of two or three days, and avoid all risk of pursuit.'

'Not quite,' said a voice close behind him; and looking round, George Fairfax saw one of the folding-doors open, and Daniel Granger standing on the threshold. The locked outer door had availed the traitor nothing. Mr. Granger had come upstairs with the porter, who carried a bunch of duplicate keys in his pocket.

Clarissa gave a sudden cry, which rose in the next instant to a shrill scream. Two men were struggling in the doorway, grappling each other savagely for one dreadful minute of confusion and agony. Then one fell heavily, his head crashing against the angle of the doorway, and lay at full length, with his white face looking up to the ceiling.

This was George Fairfax.

Clarissa threw herself upon her knees beside the prostrate figure.

'George! George!' she cried piteously.

It was the first time she had ever uttered his Christian name, except in her dreams; and yet it came to her lips as naturally in that moment of

supreme agony as if it had been their everyday utterance.

'George! George!' she cried again, bending down to gaze at the white blank face dimly visible in the firelight; and then, with a still sharper anguish, 'He is dead!'

The sight of that kneeling figure, the sound of that piteous imploring voice, was well-nigh maddening to Daniel Granger. He caught his wife by the arm, and dragged her up from her knees with no tender hand.

'You have killed him,' she said.

'I hope I have.'

Whatever latent passion there was in this man's nature was at white heat now. An awful fury possessed him. He seemed transformed by the intensity of his anger. His bulky figure rose taller; his full gray eyes shone with a pitiless light under the straight stern brows.

'Yes,' he said, 'I hope I have killed your lover.'

'My lover!'

'Your lover—the man with whom you were to have left Paris to-night. Your lover—the man you have met in this convenient rendezvous, day after day for the last two months. Your lover—the man you

loved before you did me the honour to accept the use of my fortune, and whom you have loved ever since.'

'Yes,' cried Clarissa, with a wild hysterical laugh, 'my lover! You are right. I am the most miserable woman upon earth, for I love him.'

'I am glad you do not deny it. Stand out of the way, if you please, and let me see if I have killed him.'

There were a pair of half-burned wax-candles on the mantelpiece. Mr. Granger lighted one of them, and then knelt down beside the prostrate figure with the candle in his hand. George Fairfax had given no sign of life as yet. There had not been so much as a groan.

He opened his enemy's waistcoat, and laid his hand above the region of the heart. Yes, there was life still—a dull beating. The wretch was not dead.

While he knelt thus, with his hand upon George Fairfax's heart, a massive chain, loosened from its moorings, fell across his wrist. Attached to the chain there was a locket—a large gold locket with a diamond cross—one of the ornaments that Daniel Granger had given to his wife.

He remembered it well. It was a very trifle

among the gifts he had showered upon her; but he remembered it well. If this had been the one solitary gem he had given to his wife, he could not have been quicker to recognise it, or more certain of its identity.

He took it in the palm of his hand and touched the spring, holding the candle still in the other hand. The locket flew open, and he saw the ring of silky brown hair and the inscription, 'From Clarissa.'

He looked up at his wife with a smile—such a smile!

'You might have afforded your lover something better than a secondhand *souvenir*,' he said.

Clarissa's eyes wandered from the still white face, with its awful closed eyes, only to rest for a moment on the unlucky locket.

'I gave that to my sister-in-law,' she said indifferently. 'Heaven only knows how he came by it.' And then, in a different tone, she asked, 'Why don't you do something for him? Why don't you fetch some one? Do you want him to die?'

'Yes. Do you think anything less than his death would satisfy me? Don't alarm yourself; I am not going to kill him. I was quite ready to do

it just now in hot blood. But he is safe enough now. What good would there be in making an end of him? There are two of you in it.'

'You can kill me, if you like,' said Clarissa. 'Except for my child's sake, I have little wish to live.'

'For your child's sake!' echoed her husband scornfully. 'Do you think there is anything in common between my son and you, after to-night?'

He dropped the locket on George Fairfax's breast with a contemptuous gesture, as if he had been throwing away a handful of dirt. *That* folly had cost dearly enough.

'I'll go and fetch some one,' he said. 'Don't let your distraction make you forget that the man wants all the air he can get. You had better stand away from him.'

Clarissa obeyed mechanically. She stood a little way off, staring at that lifeless figure, while Daniel Granger went to fetch the porter. The house was large, and at this time in the evening for the most part untenanted, and Austin's painting-room was over the arched carriage way. Thus it happened that no one had heard that fall of George Fairfax's.

Mr. Granger explained briefly that the gentleman had had a fall, and was stunned—would the porter

fetch the nearest doctor? The man looked at him rather suspiciously. The lovely lady's arrival in the gloaming; a locked door; this middle-aged Englishman's eagerness to get into the rooms; and now a fall; and the young Englishman is disabled. The leaf out of a romance began to assume a darker aspect. There had been murder done, perhaps, up yonder. The porter's comprehensive vision surveyed the things that might be—the house fallen into evil repute by reason of this crime, and bereft of lodgers. The porter was an elderly man, and did not care to shift his household gods.

'What have they come to do up there?' he asked. 'I think I had better fetch the *sergent de ville*.'

'You are quite at liberty to do that, provided you bring a doctor along with him,' replied Daniel Granger coolly, and then turned on his heel and walked upstairs again.

He roamed through the empty rooms with a candle in his hand until he found a bottle of water, some portion of which he dashed into his enemy's face, kneeling by his side to do it, but with a cool off-hand air, as if he were reviving a dog, and that a dog upon which he set no value.

George Fairfax opened his eyes, very slowly, and groaned aloud.

'O God, my head!' he said. 'What a blow!'

He had a sensation of lying at the bottom of a steep hill—on a sharp inclined plane, as it were, with his feet uppermost—a sense of suffocation, too, as if his throat had been full of blood. There seemed to him to be blood in his eyes also; and he could only see things in a dim cloudy way—a room—what room he could not remember—one candle flaring on the mantelpiece, and the light of an expiring fire.

Of the things that had happened to him immediately before that struggle and that fall, he had, for the time being, no memory. But by slow degrees it dawned upon him that this was Austin Lovel's painting-room.

'Where the devil are you, Austin?' he asked impatiently. 'Can't you pick a fellow up?'

A grasp stronger than ever Austin Lovel's had been, dragged him to his feet, and half led, half pushed him into the nearest chair. He sat there, staring blankly before him. Clarissa had moved away from him, and stood amid the deep shadows at the other end of the studio, waiting for her doom.

It seemed to her to matter very little what that doom should be. Perfect ruin had come upon her.

The porter came in presently with a doctor—a little old gray-headed man, who wore spectacles, and had an ancient doddering manner not calculated to inspire beholders with any great belief in his capacity.

He bowed to Mr. Granger in an old-fashioned ceremonious way, and went over to the patient.

'A fall, I believe you say, monsieur?' he said.

'Yes, a fall. He struck his head against the angle of that doorway.'

Mr. Granger omitted to state that it was a blow between the eyes from his clenched fist which had felled George Fairfax—a blow sent straight out from the powerful shoulder.

'There was no seizure—no fit of any kind, I hope?'

'No.'

The patient had recovered himself considerably by this time, and twitched his wrist rather impatiently from the little doctor's timid grasp.

'I am well enough now,' he said in a thick voice. 'There was no occasion to send for a medical man. I stumbled at the doorway yonder, and knocked my head in falling—that's all.'

The Frenchman was manipulating Mr. Fairfax's cranium with cautious fingers.

'There is a considerable swelling at the back of the skull,' he said. 'But there appears to have been another blow on the forehead. There is a puffiness, and a slight abrasion of the skin.'

Mr. Fairfax extricated his head from this investigation by standing up suddenly, out of reach of the small doctor. He staggered a little as he rose to his feet, but recovered himself after a moment or so, and stood firmly enough, with his hand resting on the back of the chair.

'If you will be good enough to accept this by way of fee,' he said, slipping a napoleon into the doctor's hand, 'I need give you no farther trouble.'

The old man looked rather suspiciously from Mr. Fairfax to Mr. Granger, and then back again. There was something queer in the business evidently, but a napoleon was a napoleon, and his fees were neither large nor numerous. He coughed feebly behind his hand, hesitated a little, and then with a sliding bow slipped from the room.

The porter lingered, determined to see the end of the romance, at any rate.

It was not long.

'Are you ready to come away?' Daniel Granger asked his wife, in a cold stern voice. And then, turning to George Fairfax, he said, 'You know where to find me, sir, when you wish to settle the score between us.'

'I shall call upon you to-morrow morning, Mr. Granger.'

Clarissa looked at George Fairfax piteously for a moment, wondering if he had been much hurt—if there were any danger to be feared from the effects of that crushing fall. Never for an instant of her life had she meant to be false to her husband; but she loved this man; and her secret being discovered now, she deemed that the bond between her and Daniel Granger was broken. She looked at George Fairfax with that brief yearning look, just long enough to see that he was deadly pale; and then left the room with her husband, obeying him mechanically. They went down the darksome staircase, which had grown so familiar to Clarissa, out into the empty street. There was a hackney carriage waiting near the archway—the carriage that had brought Mr. Granger. He put his wife into it without a word, and took his seat opposite to her; and so they drove home, in profound silence.

Clarissa went straight to her room—the dressing-room in which Daniel Granger had talked to her the night before he went to England. How well she remembered his words, and her own inclination to tell him everything! If she had only obeyed that impulse—if she had only confessed the truth—the shame and ignominy of to-night would have been avoided. There would have been no chance of that fatal meeting with George Fairfax; her husband would have sheltered her from danger and temptation—would have saved her from herself.

Vain regrets. The horror of that scene was still present with her—must remain so present with her till the end of her life, she thought. Those two men grappling each other, and then the fall—the tall figure crashing down with the force of a descending giant, as it had seemed to that terror-stricken spectator. For a long time she sat thinking of that awful moment—thinking of it with a concentration which left no capacity for any other thought in her mind. Her maid had come to her, and removed her out-of-door garments, and stirred the fire, and had set out a dainty little tea-tray on a table close at hand, hovering about her mistress with a sympathetic air, conscious that there was something amiss.

But Clarissa had been hardly aware of the girl's presence. She was living over again the agony of that moment in which she thought George Fairfax was dead.

This could not last for ever. She awoke by and by to the thought of her child, with her husband's bitter words ringing in her ears:

'Do you think there is anything in common between my son and *you*, after to-night?'

'Perhaps they will shut me out of my nursery,' she thought.

The rooms sacred to Lovel Granger were on the same floor as her own—she had stipulated that it should be so. She went out into the corridor from which all the rooms opened. All was silent. The boy had gone to bed, of course, by this time: very seldom had she been absent at the hour of his retirement. It had been her habit to spend a stolen half-hour in the nursery just before dressing for dinner, or to have her boy brought to her dressing-room—one of the happiest half-hours in her day. No one barred her entrance to the nursery. Mrs. Brobson was sitting by the fire, making-believe to be busy at needlework, with the under-nurse in attendance—a buxom damsel, whose elbows rested on the table as

she conversed with her superior. Both looked up in some slight confusion at Clarissa's entrance. They had been talking about her, she thought, but with a supreme indifference. No petty household slander could trouble her in her great sorrow. She went on towards the inner room, where her darling slept, the head-nurse following obsequiously with a candle. In the night-nursery there was only the subdued light of a shaded lamp.

'Thank you, Mrs. Brobson, but I don't want any more light,' Clarissa said quietly. 'I am going to sit with baby for a little while. Take the candle away, please; it may wake him.'

It was the first time she had spoken since she had left the Rue du Chevalier Bayard. Her own voice sounded strange to her; and yet its tone could scarcely have betrayed less agitation.

'The second dinner-bell has rung, ma'am,' Mrs. Brobson said, with a timorously-suggestive air; 'I don't know whether you are aware.'

'Yes, I know, but I am not going down to dinner; I have a wretched headache. You can tell Target to say so, if they send for me.'

'Yes, ma'am; but you'll have something sent up, won't you?'

'Not yet; by and by, perhaps, I'll take a cup of tea in my dressing-room. Go and tell Target, please, Mrs. Brobson; Mr. Granger may be waiting dinner.'

She was so anxious to get rid of the woman, to be alone with her baby. She sat down by the cot. O, inestimable treasure! had she held him so lightly as to give any other a place in her heart? To harbour any guilty thought was to have sinned against this white-souled innocent. If those clear eyes, which looked up from her breast sometimes with such angelic tenderness, could have read the secrets of her sinful heart, how could she have dared to meet their steadfast gaze? To-night that sleeping baby seemed something more to her than her child: he was her judge.

'O, my love, my love, I am not good enough to have you for my son!' she murmured, sobbing, as she knelt by his side, resting her tired head upon his pillow, thinking idly how sweet it would be to die thus, and make an end of all this evil.

She stayed with her child for more than an hour undisturbed, wondering whether there would be any attempt to take him away from her—whether there was any serious meaning in those pitiless words of Daniel Granger's. Could he think for a moment

that she would surrender him? Could he suppose that she would lose this very life of her life, and live?

At a little after nine o'clock, she heard the door of the outer nursery open, and a masculine step in the room—her husband's. The door between the two nurseries was half open. She could hear every word that was spoken; she could see Daniel Granger's figure, straight and tall and ponderous, as he stood by the table talking to Mrs. Brobson.

'I am going back to Arden the day after to-morrow, Brobson,' he said; 'you will have everything ready, if you please.'

'O, certainly, sir; we can be ready. And I'm sure I shall rejoice to see our own house again, after all the ill-conveniences of this place.' And Mrs. Brobson looked round the handsomely-furnished apartment as if it had been a hovel. 'Frenchified ways don't suit me,' she remarked. 'If, when they was furnishing their houses, they laid out more money upon water-jugs and wash-hand basins, and less upon clocks and candelabras, it would do them more credit; and if there was a chair to be had *not* covered with red velvet, it would be a comfort. Luxury is luxury; but you may overdo it.'

This complaint, murmured in a confidential tone, passed unnoticed by Daniel Granger.

'Thursday morning, then, Mrs. Brobson, remember; the train leaves at seven. You'll have to be very early.'

'It can't be too early for me.'

'I'm glad to hear that; I'll go in and take a look at the child—asleep, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir; fast asleep.'

He went into the dimly-lighted chamber, not expecting to see that kneeling figure by the cot. He gave a little start at seeing it, and stood aloof, as if there had been infection that way. Whatever he might feel or think, he could scarcely order his wife away from her son's bedside. Her son! Yes, there was the sting. However he might put her away from himself, he could not utterly sever *that* bond. He would do his best; but in the days to come his boy might revolt against him, and elect to follow that guilty mother.

He had loved her so fondly, he had trusted her so completely; and his anger against her was so much the stronger because of this. He could not forgive her for having made him so weak a dupe. Her own ignominy—and he deemed her the most

shameful of women—was not so deep as his disgrace.

He stood aloof, looking at his sleeping boy, looking across the kneeling figure as if not seeing it, but with a smouldering anger in his eyes that betrayed his consciousness of his wife's presence. She raised her haggard eyes to his face. The time would come when she would have to tell him her story—to make some attempt to justify herself—to plead for his pardon; but not yet. There was time enough for that. She felt that the severance between them was utter. He might believe, he might forgive her; but he would never give her his heart again. She felt that this was so, and submitted to the justice of the forfeiture. Nor had she loved him well enough to feel this loss acutely. Her one absorbing agony was the fear of losing her child.

Daniel Granger stood for a little while watching his son's placid slumber, and then left the room without a word. What could he say to his wife? His anger was much too great for words; but there was something more than anger: there was a revulsion of feeling, that made the woman he had loved seem hateful to him—hateful in her fatal beauty, as a snake is hateful in its lithe grace and silvery sheen.

She had deceived him so completely; there was something to his mind beyond measure dastardly in her stolen meetings with George Fairfax; and he set down all her visits to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard to that account. She had smiled in his face, and had gone every other day to meet her lover.

Clarissa stayed with her child all that night. The servants would wonder and speculate, no doubt. She knew that; but she could not bring herself to leave him. She had all manner of fantastic fears about him. They would steal him from her in the night, perhaps. That order of Daniel Granger's about Thursday morning might be only a ruse. She laid herself down upon a sofa near the cot, and pretended to sleep, until the nurse had gone to bed, after endless fussings and rustlings and movings to and fro, that were torture to Mrs. Granger's nerves; and then listened and watched all the night through.

No one came. The wintry morning dawned, and found her child still slumbering sweetly, the rosy lips ever so slightly parted, golden-tinted lashes lying on the round pink cheeks. She smiled at her own folly, as she sat watching him in that welcome daylight. What had she expected? Daniel Granger was not an ogre. He could not take her child from her.

Her child! The thought that the boy was *his* child very rarely presented itself to her. Yet it had been suggested rather forcibly by those bitter words of her husband's:

'Do you think there is anything in common between my son and you, after to-night?'

For Daniel Granger and herself there might be parting, an eternal severance; but there could be no creature so cruel as to rob her of her child.

She stayed with him during his morning ablutions; saw him splash and kick in the water with the infantine exuberance that mothers love to behold, fondly deeming that no baby ever so splashed or so kicked before; saw him arrayed in his pretty blue-braided frock, and dainty lace-bedizened cambric pinafore. What a wealth of finery and prettiness had been lavished upon the little mortal, who would have been infinitely happier dressed in rags and making mud-pies in a gutter than in his splendid raiment and well-furnished nursery; an uninteresting nursery, where there were no cupboards full of broken wagons and headless horses, flat-nosed dolls and armless grenadiers, the cast-off playthings of a flock of brothers and sisters—a very chaos of rapture for the fingers of infancy! Only a few expensive toys from a

fashionable purveyor—things that went by machinery, darting forward a little way with convulsive jerks and unearthly choking noises, and then tumbling ignominiously on one side.

Clarissa stayed with the heir of Arden until the clock in the day-nursery struck nine, and then went to her dressing-room, looking very pale and haggard after her sleepless night. In the corridor she met her husband. He bent his head gravely at sight of her, as he might have saluted a stranger whom he encountered in his own house.

'I shall be glad to speak to you for a quarter of an hour, by and by,' he said. 'What time would suit you best?'

'Whenever you please. I shall be in my dressing-room,' she answered quietly; and then, growing desperate in her desire to know her fate, she exclaimed, 'But O, Daniel, are we really to go back to Arden to-morrow?'

'*We* are not,' he said, with a repelling look. 'My children are going back to-morrow. I contemplate other arrangements for you.'

'You mean to separate my baby and me?' she cried incredulously.

'This is neither the place nor the time for any

discussion about that. I will come to your dressing-room by and by.'

'I will not be parted from my child!'

'That is a question which I have to settle.'

'Do not make any mistake, Mr. Granger,' Clarissa said firmly, facing him with a dauntless look that surprised him a little—yet what cannot a woman dare, if she can betray the man who has loved and trusted her? 'You may do what you please with me; but I will not submit to have my child taken from me.'

'I do not like talking in passages,' said her husband; 'if you insist upon discussing this matter now, we had better go into your room.'

They were close to the dressing-room door. He opened it, and they went in. The fire was burning brightly, and the small round table neatly laid for breakfast. Clarissa had been in the habit of using this apartment as her morning-room. There were books and drawing-materials, a table with a drawing-board upon it, and a half-finished sketch.

She sank down into a chair near the fire, too weak to stand. Her husband stood opposite to her. She noticed idly that he was dressed with his usual business-like neatness, and that there was no sign of

mental anguish in his aspect. He seemed very cold and hard and cruel as he stood before her, strong in his position as an injured man.

'I am not going to talk about last night any more than I am positively obliged,' he said; 'nothing that I or you could say would alter the facts of the case, or my estimation of them. I have made my plans for the future. Sophia and Lovel will go back to Yorkshire to-morrow. You will go with me to Spa, where I shall place you under your father's protection. Your future life will be free from the burden of my society.'

'I am quite willing to go back to my father,' replied Clarissa, in a voice that trembled a little. She had expected him to be very angry, but not so hard and cold as this—not able to deal with her wrong-doing in such a businesslike manner, to dismiss her and her sin as coolly as if he had been parting with a servant who had offended him.

'I am ready to go to my father, she repeated, steadying her voice with an effort; 'but I will go nowhere without my child.'

'We will see about that,' said Mr. Granger, 'and how the law will treat your claims; if you care to advance them—which I should suppose unlikely. I

have no compunction about the justice of my decision. You will go nowhere without your child, you say? Did you think of that last night when your lover was persuading you to leave Paris?'

'What!' cried Clarissa aghast. 'Do you imagine that I had any thought of going with him, or that I heard him with my free will?'

'I do not speculate upon that point; but to my mind the fact of his asking you to run away with him argues a foregone conclusion. A man rarely comes to that until he has established a right to make the request. All I know is, that I saw you on your knees by your lover, and that you were candid enough to acknowledge your affection for him. This knowledge is quite sufficient to influence my decision as to my son's future—it must not be spent with Mr. Fairfax's mistress.'

Clarissa rose at the word, with a shrill indignant cry. For a few moments she stood looking at her accuser, magnificent in her anger and surprise.

'You dare to call me *that!*' she exclaimed.

'I dare to call you what I believe you to be. What! I find you in an obscure house, with locked doors; you go to meet your lover alone; and I am to think nothing!'

'Never alone until last night, and then not with my consent. I went to see Mr. and Mrs. Austin—I did not know they had left Paris.'

'But their departure was very convenient, was it not? It enabled your lover to plead his cause, to make arrangements for your flight. You were to have three days' start of me. Pshaw! why should we bandy words about the shameful business? You have told me that you love him—that is enough.'

'Yes,' she said, with the anger and defiance gone out of her face and manner, 'I have been weak and guilty, but not as guilty as you suppose. I have done nothing to forfeit my right to my son. You shall not part us!'

'You had better tell your maid you are going on a journey to-morrow. She will have to pack your things—your jewels, and all you care to take.'

'I shall tell her nothing. Remember what I have said—I will not be separated from Lovel!'

'In that case, I must give the necessary orders myself,' said Mr. Granger coolly, and saying this he left the room to look for his wife's maid.

Jane Target, the maid, came in presently. She was the young woman chosen for Clarissa's service by Mrs. Oliver; a girl whose childhood had been

spent at Arden, and to whose childish imagination the Lovels of Arden Court had always seemed the greatest people in the world. The girl poured out her mistress's tea, and persuaded her to take something. She perceived that there was something amiss, some serious misunderstanding between Clarissa and her husband. Had not the business been fully discussed in the Areopagus downstairs, all those unaccountable visits to the street near the Luxembourg, and Mr. Fairfax's order to the coachman?

'Nor it ain't the first time I've seen him there neither,' Jarvis had remarked; 'me and Saunders have noticed him ever so many times, dropping in promiscuous like while Mrs. G. was there. Fishy, to say the least of it!'

Jane Target was very fond of her mistress, and would as soon have doubted that the sun was fire as suspected any flaw in Clarissa's integrity. She had spoken her mind more than once upon this subject in the servants' hall, and had put the bulky Jarvis to shame.

'Do, ma'am, eat something!' she pleaded, when she had poured out the tea. 'You had no dinner yesterday, and no tea, unless you had it in the nursery. You'll be fit for nothing, if you go on like this.'

Fit for nothing! The phrase roused Clarissa from her apathy. Too weak to do battle for her right to the custody of her child, she thought; and influenced by this idea, she struggled through a tolerable breakfast, eating delicate *petits pains* which tasted like ashes, and drinking strong tea with a feverish eagerness.

The tea fortified her nerves; she got up and paced her room, thinking what she ought to do.

Daniel Granger was going to take her child from her—that was certain—unless by some desperate means she secured her darling to herself. Nothing could be harder or more pitiless than his manner that morning. The doors of Arden Court were to be shut against her.

'And I sold myself for Arden!' she thought bitterly. She fancied how the record of her life would stand by and by, like a verse in those Chronicles which Sophia was so fond of: 'And Clarissa reigned a year and a half, and did that which was evil'—and so on. Very brief had been her glory; very deep was her disgrace.

What was she to do? Carry her child away before they could take him from her—secure him to herself somehow. If it were to be done at all, it

must be done quickly; and who had she to help her in this hour of desperate need?

She looked at Jane Target, who was standing by the dressing-table dusting the gold-topped scent-bottles and innumerable prettinesses scattered there —the costly trifles with which women who are not really happy strive to create for themselves a factitious kind of happiness. The girl was lingering over her work, loth to leave her mistress unless actually dismissed.

Jane Target, Clarissa remembered her a flaxen-haired cottage girl, with an honest freckled face and a calico bonnet; a girl who was always swinging on five-barred gates, or overturning a baby brother out of a primitive wooden cart — surely this girl was faithful, and would help her in her extremity. In all the world, there was no other creature to whom she could appeal.

'Jane,' she said at last, stopping before the girl and looking at her with earnest questioning eyes, 'I think I can trust you.'

'Indeed you can, ma'am,' answered Jane, throwing down her feather dusting-brush to clasp her hands impetuously. 'There's nothing in this world I would not do to prove myself true to you.'

'I am in great trouble, Jane.'

'I know that, ma'am,' the girl answered frankly.

'I daresay you know something of the cause. My husband is angry about—about an accidental meeting which arose between a gentleman and me. It was entirely accidental on my part; but he does not choose to believe this, and—' The thought of Daniel Granger's accusation flashed upon her in this moment in all its horror, and she broke down, sobbing hysterically.

The girl brought her mistress a chair, and was on her knees beside her in a moment, comforting her and imploring her to be calm.

'The trouble will pass away, ma'am,' said the maid soothingly. 'Mr. Granger will come to see his mistake. He can't be angry with you long, I'm sure; he loves you so.'

'Yes, yes, he has been very good to me—better than I have ever deserved; but that is all over now. He won't believe me—he will hardly listen to me. He is going to take away my boy, Jane.'

'Going to take away Master Lovel!'

'Yes; my darling is to go back to Arden, and I am to go to papa.'

'What!' cried Jane Target, all the woman taking

fire in her honest heart. 'Part mother and child! He couldn't do that; or if he could, he *shouldn't*, while I had the power to hinder him.'

'How are we to prevent him, Jane—you and I?'

'Let's take the darling away, ma'am, before he can stop us.'

'You dear good soul!' cried Clarissa. 'It's the very thing I've been thinking of. Heaven knows how it is to be done; but it must be done somehow. And you will come with me, Jane? and you will brave all for me, you good generous girl?'

'Lor, ma'am, what do you think I'm frightened of? Not that stuck-up Mrs. Brobson, with her grand airs, and as lazy as the voice of the sluggard into the bargain. Just you make up your mind, mum, where you'd like to go, and when you'd like to start, and I shall walk into the nursery as bold as brass, and say I want Master Lovel to come and amuse his mar for half an hour; and once we've got him safe in this room, the rest is easy. Part mother and child indeed! I should like to see him do it! I warrant we'll soon bring Mr. Granger to his senses.'

Where to go? yes, there was the rub. What a friendless creature Clarissa Granger felt, as she pondered on this serious question! To her brother?

Yes, he was the only friend she would care to trust in this emergency. But how was she to find him? Brussels was a large place, and she had no clue to his whereabouts there. Could she feel even sure that he had really gone to Brussels?

Somewhither she must go, however—that was certain. It could matter very little where she found a refuge, if only she had her darling with her. So the two women consulted together, and plotted and planned in Clarissa's sanctum; while Daniel Granger paced up and down the great dreary drawing-room, waiting for that promised visit from George Fairfax.

CHAPTER XI.

CLARISSA'S ELOPEMENT.

Mr. Fairfax came a little after noon—came with a calm grave aspect, as of a man who had serious work before him. With all his heart he wished that the days of duelling had not been over; that he could have sent his best friend to Daniel Granger, and made an end of the quarrel in a gentleman-like way, in some obscure alley at Vincennes, or amidst the shadowy aisles of St. Germains. But a duel nowadays is too complete an anachronism for an Englishman to propose in cold blood. Mr. Fairfax came to his enemy's house for one special purpose. The woman he loved was in Daniel Granger's power; it was his duty to explain that fatal meeting in Austin's rooms, to justify Clarissa's conduct in the eyes of her husband. It was not that he meant to surrender his hope of their future union—indeed, he hoped that the scene of the previous evening would bring about

a speedy separation between husband and wife. But he had placed her in a false position; she was innocent, and he was bound to assert her innocence.

He found Daniel Granger like a man of iron, fully justifying that phrase of Lady Laura's—'*Carré par le base.*' The ignominy of his own position came fully home to him at the first moment of their meeting. He remembered the day when he had liked and respected this man: he could not despise him now.

He was conscious that he carried the mark of last night's skirmish in an unpleasantly conspicuous manner. That straight-out blow of Daniel Granger's had left a discoloration of the skin—what in a meaner man might have been called a black eye. He, too, had hit hard in that brief tussle; but no stroke of his had told like that blow of the Yorkshireman's. Mr. Granger bore no trace of the encounter.

The two men met with as serene an air as if they had never grappled each other savagely in the twilight.

'I considered it due to Mrs. Granger that I should call upon you,' George Fairfax began, 'in order to explain her part in the affair of last night.'

'Go on, sir. The old story, of course—Mrs.

Granger is spotless; it is only appearances that are against her.'

'So far as she is concerned, our meeting yesterday afternoon was an accident. She came there to see another person.'

'Indeed! Mr. Austin the painter, I suppose?—a man who painted her portrait, and who had no farther acquaintance with her than that. A very convenient person, it seems, since she was in the habit of going to his rooms nearly every afternoon; and I suppose the same kind of accident as that of yesterday generally brought you there at the same time.'

'Mrs. Granger went to see her brother.'

'Her brother?'

'Yes, Austin Lovel; otherwise Mr. Austin the painter. I have been pledged to him to keep his identity a secret; but I feel myself at liberty to break my promise now—in his sister's justification.'

'You mean, that the man who came to this house as a stranger is my wife's brother?'

'I do.'

'What duplicity! And this is the woman I trusted!'

'There was no voluntary duplicity on your wife's

part. I know that she was most anxious you should be told the truth.'

'*You* know! Yes, of course; *you* are in my wife's confidence—an honour I have never enjoyed.'

'It was Austin who objected to make himself known to you.'

'I scarcely wonder at that, considering his antecedents. The whole thing has been very cleverly done, Mr. Fairfax, and I acknowledge myself completely duped. I don't think there is any occasion for us to discuss the subject farther. Nothing that you could say would alter my estimation of the events of last night. I regret that I suffered myself to be betrayed into any violence—that kind of thing is behind the times. We have wiser remedies for our wrongs nowadays.'

'You do not mean that you would degrade your wife in a law court!' cried Mr. Fairfax. 'Any legal investigation must infallibly establish her innocence; but no woman's name can escape untainted from such an ordeal.'

'No, I am not likely to do that. I have a son, Mr. Fairfax. As for my wife, my plans are formed. It is not in the power of any one living to alter them.'

'Then it is useless for me to say more. On the

honour of a gentleman, I have told you nothing but the truth. Your wife is innocent.'

'She is not guiltless of having listened to you. That is quite enough for me.'

'I have done, sir,' said George Fairfax gravely, and, with a bow and a somewhat cynical smile, departed.

He had done what he felt himself bound to do. He had no ardent wish to patch up the broken union between Clarissa and her husband. From the first hour in which he heard of her marriage, he had held it in jealous abhorrence. He had very little compunction about what had happened. It must bring matters to a crisis, he thought. In the mean time, he would have given a great deal to be able to communicate with Clarissa, and began accordingly to deliberate how that might best be done.

He did not deliberate long; for while he was meditating all manner of roundabout modes of approach, he suddenly remembered how Austin Lovel had told him he always wrote to his sister under cover to her maid. All he had to do, therefore, was to find out the maid's name.

That would be easy enough, Mr. Fairfax imagined, if his servant was good for anything. The

days of Leporello are over; but a well-bred valet may still have some little talent for diplomacy.

'My fellow has only to waylay one of Granger's grooms,' Mr. Fairfax said to himself, 'and he can get the information I want readily enough.'

There was not much time to be lost, he thought. Mr. Granger had spoken of his plans with a certain air of decision. Those plans involved some change of residence, no doubt. He would take his wife away from Paris; punish her by swift banishment from that brilliant city; bury her alive at Arden Court, and watch her with the eyes of a lynx for the rest of his life.

'Let him watch you never so closely, or shut you in what prison he may, I will find a door of escape for you, my darling,' he said to himself.

The mistress and maid were busy meanwhile, making arrangements for a sudden flight. There was very little packing to be done; for they could take nothing, or scarcely anything, with them. The great difficulty would be, to get the child out of the house. After a good deal of deliberation, they had decided the manner in which their attempt was to be made. It was dusk between five and six; and at

dusk Jane was to go to the nursery, and, in the most innocent manner possible, carry off the boy for half-an-hour's play in his mother's dressing-room. It was fortunately a usual thing for Clarissa to have him with her at this time, when she happened to be at home so early. There was a dingy servants' staircase leading from the corridor to the ground-floor; and down this they were to make their escape unobserved, the child bundled up in a shawl, Jane Target having slipped out beforehand and hired a carriage, which was to wait for them a little way off in the side street. There was a train leaving Paris at seven, which would take them to Amiens, where they could sleep that night, and go on to Brussels in the morning. Once in Brussels, they must contrive somehow to find Austin Lovel.

Of her plans for the future—how she was to live separated from her husband, and defying him—Clarissa thought nothing. Her mind was wholly occupied by that one consideration about her child. To secure him to herself was the end and aim of her existence.

It was only at Jane's suggestion that she set herself to calculate ways and means. She had scarcely any ready money—one five-pound note and a handful

of silver comprised all her wealth. She had given her brother every sixpence she could spare. There were her jewels, it is true; jewels worth three or four thousand pounds. But she shrank from the idea of touching these.

While she sat with her purse in her hand, idly counting the silver, and not at all able to realise the difficulties of her position, the faithful Jane came to her relief.

'I've got five-and-twenty pounds with me, ma'am; saved out of my wages since I've been in your service; and I'm sure you're welcome to the money.'

Jane had brought her little hoard with her, intending to invest some part of it in presents for her kindred—a shawl for her mother, and so on; but had been disappointed, by finding that the Parisian shops, brilliant as they were, contained very much the same things she had seen in London, and at higher prices. She had entertained a hazy notion that cashmere shawls were in some manner a product of the soil of France, and could be bought for a mere trifle; whereby she had been considerably taken aback when the proprietor of a plate-glass edifice on the Boulevard des Italiens asked her a thousand francs for a black cashmere, which she had set her mind

upon as a suitable covering for the shoulders of Mrs. Target.

'You dear good girl!' said Clarissa, touched by this new proof of fidelity; 'but if I should never be able to pay you the money!'

'Stuff and nonsense, ma'am! no fear of that; and if you weren't, I shouldn't care. Father and mother are comfortably off; and I'm not going to work for a pack of brothers and sisters. I gave the girls new bonnets last Easter, and sent them a ribbon apiece at Christmas; and that's enough for *them*. If you don't take the money, ma'am, I shall throw it in the fire.'

Clarissa consented to accept the use of the money. She would be able to repay it, of course. She had a vague idea that she could earn money as a teacher of drawing in some remote continental city, where they might live very cheaply. How sweet it would be to work for her child! much sweeter than to be a millionaire's wife and dress him in purple and fine linen that cost her nothing.

She spent some hours in looking over and arranging her jewels. From all of these she selected only two half-hoop diamond rings, as a reserve against the hour of need. These and these only of Daniel Gran-

ger's gifts would she take with her. She made a list of her trinkets, with a *nota bene* stating her appropriation of the two rings, and laid it at the top of her principal jewel-case. After this, she wrote a letter to her husband—a few lines only, telling him how she had determined to take her child away with her, and how she should resist to the last gasp any attempt to rob her of him.

'If I were the guilty wretch you think me,' she wrote, 'I would willingly surrender my darling, rather than degrade him by any association with such a fallen creature. But whatever wrong I have committed against you—and that wrong was done by my marriage—I have not forfeited the right to my child's affection.'

This letter written, there was nothing more to be done. Jane packed a travelling-bag with a few necessary items, and that was all the luggage they could venture to carry away with them.

The afternoon post brought a letter from Brussels, addressed to Miss Jane Target, which the girl brought in triumph to her mistress.

'There'll be no bother about finding Mr. Austin, ma'am,' she cried. 'Here's a letter!'

The letter was in Austin's usual brief careless

style, entering into no explanations; but it told the quarter in which he had found a lodging; so Clarissa was at least sure of this friendly shelter. It would be a poor one, no doubt; nor was Austin Lovel by any means a strong rock upon which to lean in the hour of trouble. But she loved him, and she knew that he would not turn his back upon her.

The rest of the day seemed long and dreary. Clarissa wandered into the nursery two or three times in order to assure herself, by the evidence of her own eyes, of her boy's safety. She found the nursemaid busy packing, under Mrs. Brobson's direction.

The day waned. Clarissa had not seen her husband since that meeting in the corridor; nor had she gone into any of the rooms where Miss Granger might be encountered. That young lady, painfully in the dark as to what had happened, sat at her table in the window, diligently illuminating, and wondering when her father would take her into his confidence. She had been told of the intended journey on the next day, and that she and her brother were to go back to Arden Court, under the protection of the servants, while Mr. Granger and his wife went elsewhere, and was not a little puzzled by the peculiarity

of the arrangement. Warman was packing, complaining the while at having to do so much in so short a time, and knew nothing of what had occurred in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard, after the dismissal of the carriage by Mr. Fairfax.

'There must have been something, miss,' she said, 'or your pa would never have taken this freak into his head—racing back as if it was for a wager; and me not having seen half I wanted to see, nor bought so much as a pincushion to take home to my friends. I had a clear month before me, I thought, so where was the use of hurrying; and then to be scampered and harum-scarumed off like this! It's really too bad.'

'I have no doubt papa has good reasons for what he is doing, Warman,' answered Miss Granger, with dignity.

'O, of course, miss; gentlefolks has always good reasons for *their* goings-on!' Warman remarked snappishly, and then 'took it out' of one of Miss Granger's bonnets during the process of packing.

Twilight came at last, the longed-for dusk, in which the attempt was to be made. Clarissa had put on one of her darkest plainest dresses, and borrowed a little black-straw bonnet of her maid's. This bon-

net and her sealskin jacket she deferred putting on until the last; for there was always the fear that Mr. Granger might come in at some awkward moment. At half-past five Jane Target went to the nursery and fetched the year-old heir of Arden Court.

He was always glad to go to his mother; and he came to-night crowing and laughing, and kicking his little blue shoes in boisterous rapture. Jane kept guard at the door while Clarissa put on her bonnet and jacket, and wrapped up the baby—first in a warm fur-lined opera-jacket, and then in a thick tartan shawl. They had no hat for him, but tied up his pretty flaxen head in a large silk handkerchief, and put the shawl over that. The little fellow submitted to the operation, which he evidently regarded in the light of an excellent joke.

Everything was now ready. Clarissa carried her baby, Jane went before with the bag, leading the way down the darksome servants' staircase, where at any moment they might meet one of Mr. Granger's retainers. Luckily, they met no one; the descent only occupied about two minutes; and at the bottom of the stairs, Clarissa found herself in a small square stone lobby, lighted by a melancholy jet of gas, and pervaded by the smell of cooking. In the next mo-

ment, Jane—who had made herself mistress of all minor details—opened a door, and they were out in the dull quiet street—the side street, at the end of which workmen were scalping away a hill.

A few doors off they found the carriage, which Jane had secured half an hour before, and a very civil driver. Clarissa told the driver where to go, and then got in, with her precious burden safe in her arms.

The precious burden set up a wail at this juncture, not understanding or approving these strange proceedings, and it was as much as his mother could do to soothe him. A few yards round the corner they passed a man, who looked curiously at the vehicle. This was George Fairfax, who was pacing the street in the gloaming in order to reconnoitre the dwelling of the woman he loved, and who let her pass him unaware. His own man was busy at the same time entertaining one of Mr. Granger's footmen in a neighbouring wine-shop, in the hope of extracting the information his master required about Mrs. Granger's maid. They reached the station just five minutes before the train left for Amiens; and once seated in the railway-carriage, Clarissa almost felt as if her victory was certain, so easily had the first stage been got over. She kissed and blessed Jane

Target, whom she called her guardian angel; and smothered her baby with kisses, apostrophising him with all manner of fond foolishness.

Everything favoured her. The flight was not discovered until nearly three-quarters of an hour after Clarissa had eloped with her baby down that darksome stair. Mrs. Brobson, luxuriating in tea, toast, and gossip before the nursery fire, and relieved not a little by the absence of her one-year-old charge, had been unconscious of the progress of time. It was only when the little clock upon the chimney-piece chimed the half-hour after six, that she began to wonder about the baby.

'His mar's had him longer than ever,' she said; 'you'd better go and fetch him, Liza. She'll be wanting to dress for dinner, I dessay. I suppose she's going down to dinner to-night, though there is something up.'

'She didn't go down to breakfast, nor yet to lunch,' said Eliza, who had her information fresh and fresh from one of the footmen; 'and Mr. Granger's been a-walking up and down the droring-room as if he was a-doing of it for a wager, William Baker says. Mr. Fairfax come this morning, and didn't stop above a quarter of a hour; but William

was outside the droring-room door all the time, and there was no loud talking, nor quarrelling, nor nothink.'

'That Fairfax is a villain,' replied Mrs. Brobson. 'I don't forget the day he kissed baby in Arden Park. I never see any good come of a single gentleman kissing a lady's baby, voluntary. It isn't their nature to do it, unless they've a hankering after the mar.'

'Lor, Brobson, how horful!' cried Eliza. And in this pleasant converse, the nurse and her subordinate wasted another five minutes.

The nursemaid frittered away a few more minutes in tapping gingerly at the dressing-room door, until at last, emboldened by the silence, she opened it, and, peering in, beheld nothing but emptiness. Mrs. Granger had gone to the drawing-room, perhaps; but where was baby? and where was Jane Target? The girl went in search of her favourite, William Baker. Were Mrs. Granger and baby in the drawing-room? No; Mr. Baker had been in attendance all the afternoon. Mrs. Granger had not left her own apartments.

'But she's not there,' cried Eliza, aghast; 'nor Target either. I've been looking for baby.'

She ran back to the dressing-room; it was still empty, and the bedroom adjoining. Mr. Granger's dressing-room was beyond that, and he was there writing letters. At this door—this sacred door, the threshold whereof she had never crossed—Eliza the nursemaid tapped nervously.

'O, if you please, sir, have you got Master Lovel?'

'No,' cried Daniel Granger, starting up from his desk. 'What made you think him likely to be here?'

'I can't find him, please, sir. I've been looking in Mrs. Granger's dressing-room, and everywhere almost. Jane Target fetched him for his ma close upon a hour ago; and Mrs. Brobson sent me for him, and I fancied as you might have got him with you, sir.'

Mr. Granger came out of his room with the lamp in his hand, and came through the bedroom to his wife's dressing-room, looking with that stern searching gaze of his into every shadowy corner, as if he thought Clarissa and her baby might be playing hide-and-seek there. But there was no one—the cheval-glass and the great glass door of the wardrobe reflected only his own figure, and the scared

nursemaid peering from behind his elbow. He went on to the nursery, opening the doors of all the rooms as he passed, and looking in. There are some convictions that come in a minute. Before that search was finished, Daniel Granger felt very sure that his wife had left him, and had taken her child away with her.

In what manner and to what doom had she gone? Was her flight a shameful one, with George Fairfax for her companion? He knew now, for the first time, that in the depths of his mind there had been some lurking belief in her innocence, it was so supreme an agony to him to imagine that she had taken a step which must make her guilt a certainty. He did not waste much time in questioning the verbose Brobson. The child was missing—that was quite clear—and his wife, and his wife's maid. It was some small relief to him to know that she had taken the honest Yorkshire girl. If she had been going to ignominy, she would scarcely have taken any one who knew her past history, above all, one whom she had known in her childhood.

What was he to do? To follow her, of course, if by any means he could discover whither she had gone. To set the telegraph wires going, also, with

a view to discovering her destination. He drove off at once to the chief telegraph office, and wrote a couple of messages, one to Mr. Lovel, at Spa—the other to Mr. Oliver, at Holborough Rectory; with a brief stern request to be informed immediately if his wife should arrive at either place. There was Lady Laura Armstrong, her most intimate friend, with whom she might possibly seek a refuge in the hour of her trouble; but he did not care to make any application in that quarter, unless driven to do so. He did not want to make his wrongs public.

From the telegraph office he drove to the Northern Railway Station, and made minute inquiries about the trains. There was a train by which she might have gone to Calais half an hour before he arrived there. He enlisted the services of an official, and promenaded the waiting-rooms and platforms, the dreary chambers in which travellers wait for their luggage, to and fro between the barriers that torment the soul of the impatient. He asked this man, and several other men, if a lady, with her baby and maid, had been observed to take their departure by any train within the last hour. But the men shrugged their shoulders hopelessly. Ladies and maids and babies came and went in flocks, and no

one noticed them. There were always babies. Yes; one of the men did remember a stout lady in a red shawl, with a baby and a birdcage and a crowd of boxes, who had gone by the second class. Is it that that was the lady monsieur was looking for, *par hasard?*

'She will go to her father,' Mr. Granger said to himself again and again; and this for the moment seemed to him such a certainty, that he had half made up his mind to start for Spa by the next train that would carry him in that direction. But the thought of George Fairfax—the possibility that his wife might have had a companion in her flight—arrested him in the next moment. 'Better that I should stop to make sure of *his* whereabouts,' he thought; and drove straight to the Champs Elysées, where Mr. Fairfax had his bachelor quarters.

Here he saw the valet, who had not long returned from that diplomatic expedition to the neighbourhood of the Rue de Morny; but who appeared the very image of unconsciousness and innocence notwithstanding. Mr. Fairfax was dining at home with some friends. Would Mr. Granger walk in? The dinner was not served yet. Mr. Fairfax would be delighted to see him.

Mr. Granger refused to go in; but told the man he should be glad to see Mr. Fairfax there, in the ante-room, for a moment. He wanted to be quite sure that the valet was not lying.

Mr. Fairfax came out, surprised at the visit.

'I had a special reason for wishing to know if you were at home this evening,' said Daniel Granger. 'I am sorry to have disturbed you, and will not detain you from your friends.'

And then the question flashed upon him—*Was she there?* No; that would be too daring. Any other refuge she might seek; but surely not this.

George Fairfax had flung the door wide open in coming out. Mr. Granger saw the dainty bachelor room, with its bright pictures shining in the lamp-light, and two young men in evening-dress lolling against the mantelpiece. The odours of an elaborate dinner were also perceptible. The valet had told the truth. Daniel Granger murmured some vague excuse, and departed.

'Queer!' muttered Mr. Fairfax as he went back to his friends. 'I'm afraid the man is going off his head; and yet he seemed cool enough to-day.'

From the Champs Elysées Mr. Granger drove to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard. There was another

possibility to be considered: if Austin the painter were indeed Austin Lovel, as George Fairfax had asserted, it was possible that Clarissa had gone to him; and the next thing to be done was to ascertain his whereabouts. The ancient porter, whom Mr. Granger had left the night before in a doubtful and bewildered state of mind, was eating some savoury mess for his supper comfortably enough this evening, but started up in surprise, with his spectacles on his forehead, at Mr. Granger's reappearance.

'I want to know where your lodger Mr. Austin went when he left here?' Mr. Granger demanded briefly.

The porter shrugged his shoulders.

'Alas, monsieur, that is an impossibility. I know nothing of Mr. Austin's destination; only that he went away yesterday, at three o'clock, in a hackney-coach, which was to take him to the Northern Railway.'

'Is there no one who can tell me what I want to know?' asked Mr. Granger.

'I doubt it, monsieur. Monsieur Austin was in debt to almost every one except his landlord. He promised to write about his furniture,—some of the movables in those rooms up-stairs are his—cabinets,

carved chairs, tapestries, and so on; but he said nothing as to where he was going.'

'He promised to write,' repeated Mr. Granger. 'That's an indefinite kind of promise. You could let me know, I suppose, if you heard anything?'

'But certainly,' replied the porter, who saw Mr. Granger's fingers in his waistcoat pocket, and scented a fee, 'monsieur should know immediately.'

Mr. Granger wrote his address upon a card, and gave it to the porter, with a napoleon.

'You shall have another when you bring me any information. Good-night.'

At home, Daniel Granger had to face his daughter, who had heard by this time of her stepmother's departure and the abstraction of the baby.

'O, papa,' she exclaimed, 'I do so feel for you!' and made as if she would have embraced her parent; but he stood like a rock, not inviting any affectionate demonstration.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said gravely; 'but I can do very well without pity. It's a kind of thing I'm not accustomed to. I am annoyed that Clarissa should have acted—in—in this ill-advised manner; but I have no doubt matters will come right in a little time.'

'Lovel — my brother is safe, papa?' inquired Sophia, clasping her hands.

'I have every reason to believe so. He is with his mother.'

Miss Granger sighed profoundly, as much as to say, 'He could not be in worse hands.'

'And I think, my dear,' continued her father, 'that the less you trouble yourself about this business the better. Any interference on your part will only annoy me, and may occasion unpleasantness between us. You will go back to Arden to-morrow, as I intended, with Warman, and one of the men to take care of your luggage. The rest of the establishment will follow in a day or so.'

'And you, papa?'

'My plans are uncertain. I shall return to Arden as soon as I can.'

'Dear old Arden!' exclaimed Sophia; 'how I wish we had never left it! How happy I was for the first four years of my life there!'

This apostrophe Mr. Granger perfectly understood—it meant that, with the advent of Clarissa, happiness had fled away from Sophia's dwelling-place. He did not trouble himself to notice the speech; but it made him angry nevertheless.

'There is a letter for you, papa,' said Miss Granger, pointing to a side-table; 'a letter which Warman found up-stairs.'

The lynx-eyed Warman, prying and peering about, had spied out Clarissa's letter to her husband, half hidden among the frivolities on the dressing-table. Mr. Granger pounced upon it eagerly, full of hope. It might tell him all he wanted to know.

It told him nothing. The words were not consistent with guilt, unless Clarissa were the very falsest of women. But had she not been the falsest? Had she not deceived him grossly, unpardonably? Alas, he was already trying to make excuses for her —trying to believe her innocent. Innocent of what society calls sin—yes, she might be that. But had he not seen her kneeling beside her lover? Had she not owned that she loved him? She had; and the memory of her words was poison to Daniel Granger.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF ST. GUDULE.

It was about half an hour before noon on the following day when Clarissa arrived at Brussels, and drove straight to her brother's lodging, which was in an obscure street under the shadow of St. Gudule. Austin was at work in a room opening straight from the staircase — a bare, shabby-looking chamber — and looked up from his easel with profound astonishment on beholding Mrs. Granger with her maid and baby.

'Why, Clary, what, in the name of all that's wonderful, brings you to Brussels?' he exclaimed.

'I have come to live with you for a little while, Austin, if you will let me,' she answered quietly. 'I have no other home now.'

Austin Lovel laid down his palette, and came across the room to receive her.

'What does it all mean, Clary? — Look here,

young woman,' he said to Jane Target; 'you'll find my wife in the next room; and she'll help you to make that youngster comfortable.—Now, Clary,' he went on, as the girl curtseyed and vanished through the door that divided the two rooms, 'what does it all mean?'

Clarissa told him her story—told it, that is to say, as well as she could tell a story which reflected so much discredit upon herself.

'I went to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard at 5 on Tuesday—as I promised, you know, Austin—and found Mr. Fairfax there. You may imagine how surprised I was when I heard you were gone. He did not tell me immediately; and he detained me there—talking to me.'

The sudden crimson which mounted to her very temples at this juncture betrayed her secret.

'Talking to you!' cried Austin; 'you mean making love to you! The infernal scoundrel!'

'It was—very dishonourable!'

'That's a mild way of putting it. What! he hung about my rooms when I had gone, to get you into a trap, as it were, at the risk of compromising you in a most serious manner! You never gave him any encouragement, did you, Clarissa?'

'I never meant to do so.'

'You never meant! But a woman must know what she is doing. You used to meet him at my rooms very often. If I had dreamt there was any flirtation between you, I should have taken care to put a stop to *that*. Well, go on. You found Fairfax there, and you let him detain you, and then—?'

'My husband came, and there was a dreadful scene, and he knocked Mr. Fairfax down.'

'Naturally. I respect him for doing it.'

'And for a few minutes I thought he was dead,' said Clarissa with a shudder; and then she went on with her story, telling her brother how Daniel Granger had threatened to separate her from her child.

'That was hard lines,' said Austin; 'but I think you would have done better to remain passive. It's natural that he should take this business rather seriously at first: but that would wear off in a short time. What you have done will only widen the breach.'

'I have got my child,' said Clarissa.

'Yes; but in any case you must have had him. That threat of Granger's was only blank cartridge. He could not deprive you of the custody of your son.'

'He will try to get a divorce, perhaps. He thinks me the vilest creature in the world.'

'A divorce—bosh! Divorces are not obtained so easily. What a child you are, Clarissa!'

'At any rate, he was going to take me back to papa in disgrace. I could not have endured that. My father would think me guilty, perhaps.'

Again the tell-tale crimson flushed Clarissa's face. The memory of that September evening at Mill Cottage flashed across her mind, and her father's denunciation of George Fairfax and his race.

'Your father would be wise enough to defend his child, I imagine,' replied Austin, 'although he is not a person whose conduct I would pretend to answer for. But this quarrel between you and your husband must be patched up, Clary.'

'That will never be.'

'It must be—for your son's sake, if not for yours. You pretend to love that boy, and are yet so blind to his interests? He is not the heir to an entailed estate, remember. Granger is a self-made man, and if you offend him, may leave Arden Court to his daughter's children.'

She had robbed her son of his birthright, perhaps.

For what? Because she had not had the strength to shut her heart against a guilty love; because, in the face of every good resolution she had ever made, she had been weak enough to listen when George Fairfax chose to speak.

'It seems very hard,' she said helplessly.

'It would be uncommonly hard upon that child, if this breach were not healed. But it must be healed.'

'You do not know half the bitter things Mr. Granger said. Nothing would induce me to humiliate myself to him.'

'Not the consideration of your son's interests?'

'God will protect my son; he will not be punished for any sin of his mother's.'

'Come now, Clary, be reasonable. Let me write to Granger in my own proper character, telling him that you are here.'

'If you do that, I will never forgive you. It would be most dishonourable, most unkind. You will not do that, Austin?'

'Of course I will not, if you insist upon it. But I consider that you are acting very foolishly. There must have been a settlement, by the way, when you married. Do you remember anything about it?'

'Very little. There was five hundred a year settled on me for pin money; and five hundred a year for papa, settled somehow. The reversion to come to me, I think they said. And—yes, I remember—if I had any children, the eldest son was to inherit Arden Court.'

'That's lucky! I thought your father would never be such a fool as to let you marry without some arrangement of that sort.'

'Then my darling is safe, is he not?'

'Well, yes, I suppose so.'

'And you will not betray me, Austin?' said Clarissa imploringly.

'Betray you! If you put it in that way, of course not. But I should be acting more in your interests if I wrote to Granger. No good can come of the step you have taken. However, we must trust to the chapter of accidents,' added Austin, with a resumption of his habitual carelessness. 'I needn't tell you that you are heartily welcome to my hospitality, such as it is. Our quarters are rough enough, but Bessie will do what she can to make you comfortable; and I'll put on a spurt and work extra hard to keep things together. I have found a dealer in the Montagne de la Cour, who is willing to take

my sketches at a decent price. Look here, Clary, how do you like this little bit of *genre*? "Forbidden Fruit"—a chubby six-year-old girl, on tiptoe, trying to filch a peach growing high on the wall; flimsy child, and pre-Raphaelite wall. Peach, carnation velvet; child's cheek to match the peach. Rather a nice thing, isn't it?' asked Austin lightly.

Clarissa made some faint attempt to appear interested in the picture, which she only saw in a dim far-off way.

'I shall be very glad to see where you are going to put baby,' she said anxiously.

The bleak and barren aspect of the painting-room did not promise much for the accommodation or comfort of Mr. Lovel's domicile.

'Where I am going to put baby! Ah, to be sure, you will want a room to sleep in,' said Austin, as if this necessity had only just struck him. 'We'll soon manage that; the house is roomy enough,—a perfect barrack, in fact. There was a lace-factory carried on in it once, I believe. I daresay there's a room on this floor that we can have. I'll go and see about that, while you make yourself comfortable with Bessie. We have only two rooms—this and the next, which is our bedroom; but we shall do

something better by and by, if I find my pictures sell pretty fast.'

He went off whistling an opera air, and by no means oppressed by the idea that he had a sister in difficulties cast upon his hands.

There was a room—a darksome chamber at the back of the house—looking into a narrow alley, where domestic operations of some kind seemed to be going on in every window and doorway, but sufficiently spacious, and with two beds. It was altogether homely, but looked tolerably clean; and Clarissa was satisfied with it, although it was the poorest room that had ever sheltered her. She had her baby—that was the grand point; and he rolled upon the beds, and crowed and chattered, in his half inarticulate way, with as much delight as if the shabby chamber had been an apartment in a palace.

'If he is happy, I am more than content!' exclaimed Mrs. Granger.

A fire was lighted in the stove, and Bessie brought them a second breakfast of coffee and rolls, and a great basin of bread and milk for young Lovel. The little man ate ravenously, and did not cry for Brobson—seemed indeed rather relieved to have escaped from the jurisdiction of that respectable matron. He

was fond of Jane Target, who was just one of those plump apple-cheeked young women whom children love instinctively, and who had a genius for singing ballads of a narrative character, every verse embellished with a curious old-fashioned quavering turn.

After this refreshment—the first that Clarissa had taken with any approach to appetite since that luckless scene in her brother's painting-room—Jane persuaded her mistress to lie down and rest, which she did, falling asleep peacefully, with her boy's bright young head nestling beside her on the pillow. It was nearly dark when she awoke; and after dinner she went out for a walk with Austin, in the bright gas-lit streets, and along a wide boulevard, where the tall bare trees looked grim in the darkness. The freedom of this new life seemed strange to her, after the forms and ceremonies of her position as Daniel Granger's wife, and Sophia Granger's stepmother—strange, and not at all unpleasant.

'I think I could be very happy with you and Bessie always, Austin,' she said, 'if they would only leave me in peace.'

'Could you, Clary? I'm sure I should be very glad to have you; but it would be rather hard upon Granger.'

'He was going to take me back to papa; he wanted to get rid of me.'

'He was in a passion when he talked about that, rely upon it.'

'He was as cold as ice, Austin. I don't believe he was ever in a passion in his life.'

CHAPTER XIII.

TEMPTATION.

It was Sunday; and Clarissa had been nearly a week in Brussels—a very quiet week, in which she had had nothing to do but worship her baby, and tremblingly await any attempt that might be made to wrest him from her. She lived in hourly fear of discovery, and was startled by every step on the staircase and fluttered by every sudden opening of a door, expecting to see Daniel Granger on the threshold.

She went to church alone on this first Sunday morning. Austin was seldom visible before noon, dawdling away the bleaker morning hours smoking and reading in bed. Bessie had a world of domestic business on her hands, and the two boys to torment her while she attempted to get through it. So Clarissa went alone to St. Gudule. There were Protest-

ant temples, no doubt, in the Belgian city wherein she might have worshipped; but that solemn pile drew her to itself with a magnetic attraction. She went in among the gay-looking crowd—the old women in wondrous caps, the sprinkling of soldiers, the prosperous citizens and citizenesses in their Sunday splendour—and made her way to a quiet corner remote from the great carved-oak pulpit and the high altar—a shadowy corner behind a massive cluster of columns, and near a little wooden door in one of the great portals, that opened and shut with a clanging noise now and then, and beside which a dilapidated-looking old man kept watch over a shell-shaped marble basin of holy water, and offered a brush dipped in the sacred fluid to devout passers-by. Here she could kneel unobserved, and in her ignorant fashion, join in the solemn service, lifting up her heart with the elevation of the host, and acknowledging her guiltiness in utter humility of spirit.

Yet not always throughout that service could she keep her thoughts from wandering. Her mind had been too much troubled of late for perfect peace or abstraction of thought to be possible to her. The consideration of her own folly was very constantly

with her. What a wreck and ruin she had made of her life—a life which from first to last had been governed by impulse only!

'If I had been an honourable woman, I should never have married Daniel Granger,' she said to herself. 'What right had I to take so much and give so little—to marry a man I could not even hope to love for the sake of winning independence for my father, or for the sake of my old home?'

Arden Court—was not that the price which had made her sacrifice tolerable to her? And she had lost it; the gates of the dwelling she loved were closed upon her once again—and this time for ever. How the memory of the place came back to her this chill March morning!—the tall elms rocking in the wind, the rooks' nests tossing in the topmost branches, and the hoarse cawing of discontented birds bewailing the tardiness of spring.

'It will be my darling's home in the days to come,' she said to herself; but even this thought brought no consolation. She dared not face her son's future. Would it not involve severance from her? Now, while he was an infant, she might hold him; but by and by the father's stern claim would be heard. They would take the boy away from her

—teach him to despise and forget her. She fancied herself wandering and watching in Arden Park, a trespasser, waiting for a stolen glimpse of her child's face.

'I shall die before that time comes,' she thought gloomily.

Some such fancy as this held her absorbed when the high mass concluded, and the congregation began to disperse. The great organ was pealing out one of Mozart's Hallelujahs. There was some secondary service going on at the other end of the church. Clarissa still knelt, with her face hidden in her hands, not praying, only conjuring up dreadful pictures of the future. Little by little the crowd melted away; there were only a few worshippers murmuring responses in the distance; the last chords of the Hallelujah crashed and resounded under the vaulted roof; and at last Clarissa looked up and found herself almost alone.

She went out, but shrank from returning immediately to her child. Those agitating thoughts had affected her too deeply. She walked away from the church up towards the park, hoping to find some quiet place where she might walk down the disturbance in her mind, so as to return with a calm smiling

face to her darling. It was not a tempting day for any purposeless pedestrian. The sky had darkened at noon, and there was a drizzling rain coming down from the dull gray heavens. The streets cleared quickly now the services were over; but Clarissa went on, scarcely conscious of the rain, and utterly indifferent to any inconvenience it might cause her.

She was in the wide open place near the park, when she heard footsteps following her, rapidly, and with a purpose, as it seemed. Some women have a kind of instinct about these things. She knew in a moment, as if by some subtle magnetism, that the man following her was George Fairfax.

'Clarissa,' said a voice close in her ear; and turning quickly, she found herself face to face with him.

'I was in the church,' he said, 'and have followed you all the way here. I waited till we were clear of the narrow streets and the crowd. O, my darling, thank God I have found you! I only knew yesterday that you had left Paris; and some happy instinct brought me here. I felt sure you would come to Austin. I arrived late last night, and was loafing about the streets this morning, wondering

how I should discover your whereabouts, when I turned a corner and saw you going into St. Gudule. I followed, but would not disturb your orisons, fair saint. I was not very far off, Clarissa—only on the other side of the pillar.'

'Was it kind of you to follow me here, Mr. Fairfax?' Clarissa asked gravely. 'Have you not brought enough trouble upon me as it is?'

'Brought trouble upon you! Yes, that seems hard; but I suppose it was my fate to do that, and to make amends for it afterwards, dearest, in a life that shall know no trouble.'

'I am here with my son, Mr. Fairfax. It was the fear of being separated from him that drove me away from Paris. If you have one spark of generous feeling, you will not pursue me or annoy me here. If my husband were to see us together, or were to hear of our being seen together, he would have just grounds for taking my child away from me.'

'Clarissa,' exclaimed George Fairfax with intensity, 'let us make an end of all folly and beating about the bush at once and for ever. I do not say that I am not sorry for what happened the other night—so far as it caused annoyance to you—but

I am heartily glad that matters have been brought to a crisis. The end must have come sooner or later, Clary — so much the better if it has come quickly. There is only one way to deal with the wretched mistake of your marriage, and that is to treat it as a thing that has never been. There are places enough in the world, Clary, in which you and I are nameless and unknown, and we can be married in one of those places. I will run all risks of a criminal prosecution and seven years at Portland. You shall be my wife, Clarissa, by as tight a knot as church and state can tie.'

She looked at him with a half scornful smile.

'Do you think you are talking to a child?' she said.

They had been standing in the chill drizzling rain all this time, unconscious, and would have so stood perhaps, if a shower of fire and brimstone had been descending upon Brussels. But at this juncture Mr. Fairfax suddenly discovered that it was raining, and that Clarissa's shawl was growing rapidly damper.

'Good heavens!' he exclaimed, 'what a brute I am! I must find you some kind of shelter.'

There was a café near at hand, the café attached

to the Théâtre du Parc, with rustic out-of-door constructions for the accommodation of its customers. Mr. Fairfax conducted Clarissa to one of these wooden arbours, where they might remain till the rain was over or till he chose to bring her a carriage. He did not care to do that very soon. He had a great deal to say to her. This time he was resolved not to accept defeat.

A solitary waiter espied them promptly, having so little to do in this doleful weather, and came for orders. Mr. Fairfax asked for some coffee, and waited in silence while the man brought a little tray with cups and saucers and a great copper coffee-pot, out of which he poured the black infusion with infinite flourish.

'Bring some cognac,' said Mr. Fairfax; and when the spirit had been brought, he poured half a wine-glassful into a cup of coffee, and entreated Clarissa to drink it as an antidote to cold. 'You were walking ever so long in the rain,' he said.

She declined the nauseous dose.

'I am not afraid of catching cold,' she said; 'but I shall be very glad if you will let that man fetch me a fly. I ought to have been at home half an hour ago.'

'At home! Is it permissible to ask where you live?'

'I would rather not tell you my address. I hope, if my being here had anything to do with your coming to Brussels, that you will go back to Paris at once.'

'I shall never go back to Paris, unless I enter its gates with you some day. I am going to the East, Clary; to Constantinople, and Athens, and all the world of fable and story, and you are going with me—you and young Lovel. Do you know there is one particular spot in the island of Corfu which I have pitched upon for the site of a villa, just such a fairy dwelling-place as you can sketch for me—your own architecture—neither gothic nor composite, neither classic nor rustic, only *le style Clarisse;* not for our permanent dwelling—to my mind, nothing but poverty should ever chain a man to one habitation—but as a nest to which we might fly now and then, when we were weary of roaming.'

He was talking lightly, after his nature, which was of the lightest, but for a purpose also, trying to beguile Clarissa from serious considerations, to bring a smile to the pale sad face, if he could. In vain; the hazel eyes looked straight forward with

an unwonted fixedness, the lips were firmly set, the hands clasped rigidly.

After this, his tone grew more earnest; again he pleaded, very much as he had pleaded before, but with a stronger determination, with a deeper passion, painting the life that might be for those two in the warmest brightest colours that his fancy could lend it. What had she to care for? he argued. Absolutely nothing. She had broken with her husband, whom George Fairfax knew by his own experience to be implacable in his resentment. And O, how much to gain! A life of happiness; all her future spent with the man who loved her; spent wherever and however she pleased. What was he but her slave, to obey her?

She was not unmoved by his pleading. Unmoved? These were words and tones that went home to her heart of hearts. Yes, she could imagine the life he painted so well. Yes, she knew what the future would seem to her, if it were to be spent with him. She loved him dearly—had so loved him ever since that night in the railway-carriage, she thought. When had his image been really absent from her since that time?

He insisted that she should hear him to the end,

and she submitted, not unwillingly perhaps. She had no thought of yielding; but it was sweet to her to hear his voice—for the last time, she told herself; this *must* be the last time. Even while he pleaded and argued and demonstrated that the wisest thing in the world she could do was to run away with him, she was meditating her plan of escape. Not again must they meet thus. She had a certain amount of strength of mind, but it was not inexhaustible, and she felt her weakness.

'You forget that I have a son,' she said at last, when he urged her to speak.

'He shall be *my* son. Do you think I do not love that rosy yearling? He shall inherit Lyvedon, if you like; there is no entail; I can do what I please with it. Yes, though I had sons of my own, he should be first, by right of any wrong we may do him now. In the picture I have made of our future life, I have never omitted that figure, Clarissa. Forget your son! No, Clary; when I am less than a father to him, tell me that I never loved you.'

This was the man's way of looking at the question; the boy's future should be provided for, he should have a fine estate left him by way of solatium. The mother thought of what her son would

think of *her*, when he grew old enough to consider her conduct.

'I must ask you to get me a fly somehow, Mr. Fairfax,' she said quietly. 'It is still raining, and I am really anxious to get home to Lovel. I am sorry you should have taken so much trouble about me; it is quite useless, believe me. I know that I have been very weak—guilty even—in many ways since I have known you; but that is all over now. I have paid the penalty in the loss of my husband's esteem. I have nothing now to live for but my child.'

'And is that to be the end of everything, Mrs. Granger?' asked George Fairfax, with an angry look in his eyes. 'Are we to part upon that? It is such an easy thing to lure a man on to a certain point, and then turn upon him and protest you never meant to go beyond that point. *You* have paid the penalty! Do you think I have paid no penalty? Was it a pleasant thing to me, do you suppose, to jilt Geraldine Challoner? *I* trampled honour in the dust for your sake, Clarissa. Do you know that there is a coolness between my mother and me at this moment, because of my absence from England and that broken-off marriage? Do you know that

I have turned my back for ever upon a place that any man might be proud to call his home, for the sake of being near you? I have cast every consideration to the winds; and now that you have actually broken loose from your bondage, now that there is nothing to come between us and a happy future, you set up your son as an obstacle, and'—he concluded with a bitter laugh—'ask me to fetch you a fly!'

'I am sorry to wound you; but—but—I cannot bring dishonour upon my son.'

'Your son!' cried George Fairfax savagely. 'An east wind may blow your son off the face of the earth to-morrow. Is a one-year-old baby to stand between a man and his destiny? Come, Clary, I have served my apprenticeship; I have been very patient; but my patience is exhausted. You must leave this place with me to-night.'

'Mr. Fairfax, will you get me a fly, or must I walk home?'

He looked at her fixedly for a few moments, intent upon finding out if she were really in earnest, if this cold persistence were unconquerable even by him. Her face was very pale, the eyes downcast, the mouth firm as marble.

'Clarissa,' he cried, 'I have been fooled from first to last—you have never loved me!'

Those words took her off her guard; she lifted her eyes to meet his, eyes full of love and despair, and again he told himself success was only a question of time. His apprenticeship was not finished yet; he must be content to serve a little longer. When she had tasted the bitterness of her new life, its helplessness, its desolation, with only such a broken reed as Austin Lovel to lean upon, she would turn to him naturally for comfort and succour, as the fledgling flies back to its nest.

But if in the mean time Daniel Granger should relent and pursue her, and take her back to his heart with pardon and love? There was the possibility of that event; yet to press matters too persistently would be foolish, perilous even. Better to let her have her own way for a little, since he knew that she loved him.

He went to look for the depressed waiter, whom he dispatched in quest of a vehicle, and then returned to the rustic shelter, where Clarissa sat like a statue, watching the rain pouring down monotonously in a perpetual drizzle. They heard the wheels of the carriage almost immediately. Mr. Fair-

fax offered his arm to Clarissa, and led her out of the garden; the obsequious waiter on the other side holding an umbrella over her head.

'Where shall I tell the man to drive?' he asked.

'To St. Gudule.'

'But you don't live in the cathedral, like Hugo's Esmeralda. Am I not to know your address?'

'It is better not. Austin knows that you were the cause of my leaving Paris. If you came, there might be some misunderstanding.'

'I am not afraid of facing Austin.'

'But I am afraid of any meeting between you. I cannot tell you where I am living, Mr. Fairfax.'

'That seems rather hard upon me. But you will let me see you again, won't you, Clary? Meet me here to-morrow at dusk — say at six o'clock. Promise to do that, and I will let you off.'

She hesitated, looking nervously to the right and left, like a hunted animal.

'Promise, Clary; it is not very much to ask.'

'Very well, then, I promise. Only please let the man drive off to St. Gudule, and pray don't follow me.'

Mr. Fairfax grasped her hand. 'Remember, you have promised,' he said, and then gave the coach-

man his orders. And directly the fly containing Clarissa had rattled off, he ran to the nearest stand and chartered another.

'Drive to St. Gudule,' he said to the man, 'and when you see a carriage going that way, keep behind it, but not too near.'

It happened, however, that the first driver had the best horse, and, being eager to earn his fare quickly, had deposited Clarissa in the Place Gudule before George Fairfax's charioteer could overtake him. She had her money ready to slip into the man's hand, and she ran across the square and into the narrow street where Austin lived, and vanished, before Mr. Fairfax turned the corner of the square.

He met the empty vehicle, and dismissed his own driver thereupon in a rage. 'Your horse ought to be suppressed by the legal authorities,' he said, as he gave the man his fare.

She must live very near the cathedral, he concluded, and he spent a dreary hour patrolling the narrow streets round about in the wet. In which of those dull-looking houses had she her dwelling? He could not tell. He walked up and down, staring up at all the windows with a faint hope of seeing her,

but in vain; and at last went home to his hotel crestfallen and disappointed.

'She escapes me at every turn,' he said to himself. 'There is a kind of fatality. Am I to grow old and gray in pursuing her, I wonder? I feel ten years older already, since that night when she and I travelled together.'

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE WING.

CLARISSA hung over her baby with all manner of fond endearments.

'My darling! my darling!' she sobbed; 'is it a hard thing to resist temptation for your sake?'

She had shed many bitter tears since that interview with George Fairfax, alone in the dreary room, while Lovel slept the after-dinner sleep of infancy, and while Mrs. Lovel and Jane Target gossipped sociably in the general sitting-room. Austin was out playing dominoes at the café of a Thousand Columns, with some Bohemianishly-disposed Bruxellois.

She had wept for the life that might have been, but which never could be. On that point she was decided. Not under the shadow of dishonour could she spend her days. She had her son. If she had been alone, utterly desolate, standing on some iso-

lated rock, with nothing but the barren sea around her, she might perhaps have listened to that voice which was so very sweet to her, and yielded. But to take this dreadful leap which she was asked to take, alone, was one thing; to take it with her child in her arms, another. Her fancy, which was very vivid, made pictures of what her boy's future might be, if she were to do this thing. She thought of him stung by the mention of his mother's name, as if it were the foulest insult. She thought of his agony when he heard other men talk of their mothers, and remembered the blackness of darkness that shrouded his. She thought of the boyish intellect opening little by little, first with vague wonder, then fearful curiosity, to receive this fatal knowledge; and then the shame for that young innocent soul!

'O, not for worlds!' she cried, 'O, not for worlds! God keep me from any more temptation!'

Not with mere idle prayers did she content herself. She knew her danger; that man was resolute, unscrupulous, revengeful even: and she loved him. She determined to leave Brussels. She would go and lose herself in the wide world of London; and then, after a little while, when all possibility of her movements being traced was over, she would take

her child to some secluded country place, where there were woods and meadows, and where the little dimpled hands could gather bright spring flowers. She announced her intention to her brother that evening, when he came home at a latish hour from the Thousand Columns, elated by having won three francs and a half at dominoes—an amount which he had expended on cognac and syphons for himself and his antagonist.

He was surprised, vexed even, by Clarissa's decision. Why had she come to him, if she meant to run away directly? What supreme folly to make such a journey for nothing! Why did she not go from Paris to London at once?

'I did not think of that, Austin; I was almost out of my senses that day, I think, after Daniel told me he was going to separate me from my boy; and it seemed natural to me to fly to you for protection.'

'Then why run away from me? Heaven knows, you are welcome to such a home as I can give. The quarters are rough, I know; but we shall improve that, by and by.'

'No, no, Austin, it is not that. I should be quite happy with you, only—only—I have a particular reason for going to London.'

'Clarissa!' cried her brother sternly, 'has that man anything to do with this? Has he tried to lure you away from here, to your destruction?'

'No, no, no! you ought to know me better than that. Do you think I would bring dishonour upon my boy?'

Her face told him that she was speaking the truth.

'Very well, Clary,' he said with a sigh of resignation; 'you must do as you please. I suppose your reason is a good one, though you don't choose to trust me.'

So, by an early train next morning, Clarissa, with her nurse and child, left Brussels for Ostend—a somewhat dreary place wherein to arrive in early spring-time, with March winds blowing bleak across the sandy dunes.

They had to spend a night here, at a second-rate hotel on the Quay.

'We must go to humble-looking places, you know, Jane, to make our money last,' Clarissa said on the journey. They had travelled second-class; but she had given a five-pound note to her brother, by way of recompense for the brief accommodation he had given her, not telling him how low her stock

was. Faithful Jane's five-and-twenty pounds were vanishing. Clarissa looked at the two glittering circlets on her wedding finger.

'We cannot starve while we have these,' she thought; and once in London, she could sell her drawings. Natural belief of the school-girl mind, that water-coloured sketches are a marketable commodity!

Again in the dismal early morning—that sunrise of which poets write so sweetly, but which to the unromantic traveller is wont to seem a dreary thing—mother and nurse and child went their way in a great black steamer, redolent of oil and boiled mutton; and at nine o'clock at night—a starless March night—Clarissa and her belongings were deposited on St. Katharine's Wharf, amidst a clamour and bustle that almost confused her senses.

She had meditated and debated and puzzled herself all through the day's voyage, sitting alone on the windy deck, brooding over her troubles, while Jane kept young Lovel amused and happy below. Inexperienced in the ways of every-day life as a child—knowing no more now than she had known in her school-girl days at Belforêt—she had made her poor little plan, such as it was.

Two or three times during her London season she had driven through Soho—those weird dreary streets between Soho-square and Regent-street—and had contemplated the gloomy old houses, with a bill of lodgings to let here and there in a parlour-window; anon a working jeweller's humble shop breaking out of a private house; here a cheap restaurant, there a French laundress; everywhere the air of a life which is rather a struggle to live than actual living. In this neighbourhood, which was the only humble quarter of the great city whereof she had any knowledge, Clarissa fancied they might find a temporary lodging—only a temporary shelter, for all her hopes and dreams pointed to some fair rustic retreat, where she might live happily with her treasure. Once lodged safely and obscurely, where it would be impossible for either her husband or George Fairfax to track her, she would spend a few shillings in drawing-materials, and set to work to produce a set of attractive sketches, which she might sell to a dealer. She knew her brother's plan of action, and fancied she could easily carry it out upon a small scale.

'So little would enable us to live happily, Jane,' she said, when she revealed her ideas to her faithful follower.

'But O, mum, to think of you living like that, with such a rich husband as Mr. Granger, and him worshipping the ground you walk upon, as he did up to the very last: and as to his anger, I'm sure it was only tempory, and he's sorry enough he drove you away by this time, I'll lay.'

'He wanted to take away my child, Jane.'

They took a cab, and drove from Thames-street to Soho. Clarissa had never been through the City at night before, and she thought the streets would never end. They came at last into that quieter and dingier region; but it was past ten o'clock, and hard work to find a respectable lodging at such an hour. Happily the cabman was a kindly and compassionate spirit, and did his uttermost to help them, moving heaven and earth, in the way of policemen and small shopkeepers, until, by dint of much inquiry, he found a decent-looking house in a *cul-de-sac* out of Dean-street—a little out-of-the-way quadrangle, where the houses were large and stately, and had been habitations of sweetness and light in the days when Soho was young, and Monmouth the young man of the period.

To one of these houses the cabman had been directed by a good-natured cheesemonger, at a corner

not far off; and here Clarissa found a second-floor—a gaunt-looking sitting-room, with three windows and oaken window-seats, sparsely furnished, but inexorably clean; a bed-room adjoining—at a rent which seemed moderate to this inexperienced wayfarer. The landlady was a widow—is it not the normal state of landladies?—cleanly and conciliating, somewhat surprised to see travellers with so little luggage, but reassured by that air of distinction which was inseparable from Mrs. Granger, and by the presence of the maid.

The cabman was dismissed, with many thanks and a princely payment; and so Clarissa began life alone in London.

CHAPTER XV.

IN TIME OF NEED.

It was a dreary habitation, that London lodging, after the gardens and woods of Arden, the luxurious surroundings and innumerable prettinesses which Mr. Granger's wealth had provided for the wife of his love; dreary after the holiday brightness of Paris; dreary beyond expression to Clarissa in the long quiet evenings when she sat alone, trying to face the future—the necessity for immediate action being over, and the world all before her.

She had her darling. That was the one fact which she repeated to herself over and over again, as if the words had been a charm — an amulet to drive away guilty thoughts of the life that might have been, if she had listened to George Fairfax's prayer.

It was not easy for her to shut *that* image out

of her heart, even with her dearest upon earth beside her. The tender pleading words, the earnest face, came back to her very often. She thought of him wandering about those hilly streets in Brussels, disappointed and angry; thought of his reproaches, and the sacrifices he had made for her.

And then from such weak fancies she was brought suddenly back by the necessities of every-day life. Her money was very nearly gone; the journeys had cost so much, and she had been obliged to buy clothing for Jane and Lovel and herself at Brussels. She had spent a sovereign on colours and brushes and drawing-paper at Winsor and Newton's—her little stock-in-trade. She looked at her diamond rings meditatively as she sat brooding in the March twilight, with as vague an idea of their value as a child might have had. The time was very near when she would be obliged to turn them into money.

Fortunately the woman of the house was friendly, and the rooms were clean. But the airs of Soho are not as those breezes which come blowing over Yorkshire wolds and woods, with the breath of the German Ocean; nor had they the gay Tuileries garden and the Bois for Master Lovel's airings. Jane Target was sorely puzzled where to take the child.

It was a weary long way to St. James's Park on foot; and the young mother had a horror of omnibuses—in which she supposed smallpox and fever to be continually raging. Sometimes they had a cab, and took the boy down to feed the ducks and stare at the soldiers. But in the Park Clarissa had an ever-present terror of being seen by some one she knew. Purposeless prowlings with baby in the streets generally led unawares into Newport-market, from which busy mart Mrs. Granger fled aghast, lest her darling should die of the odour of red herrings and stale vegetables. In all the wider streets Clarissa was afflicted by that perpetual fear of being recognised; and during the airings which Lovel enjoyed with Jane alone the poor mother endured unspeakable torments. At any moment Mr. Granger, or some one employed by Mr. Granger, might encounter the child, and her darling be torn from her; or some accident might befall him. Clarissa's inexperience exaggerated the perils of the London streets, until every paving-stone seemed to bristle with dangers. She longed for the peace and beauty of the country; but not until she had found some opening for the disposal of her sketches could she hope to leave London. She worked on bravely for a fortnight,

painting half a dozen hours a day, and wasting the rest of her day in baby worship, or in profound plottings and plannings about the future with Jane Target. The girl was thoroughly devoted, ready to accept any scheme of existence which her mistress might propose. The two women made their little picture of the life they were to lead when Clarissa had found a kindly dealer to give her constant employment: a tiny cottage, somewhere in Kent or Surrey, among green fields and wooded hills, furnished ever so humbly, but with a garden where Lovel might play. Clarissa sketched the ideal cottage one evening—a bower of roses and honeysuckle, with a thatched roof and steep gables. Alas, when she had finished her fortnight's work, and carried half a dozen sketches to a dealer in Rathbone-place, it was only to meet with a crushing disappointment. The man admitted her power, but had no use for anything of that kind. Chromolithographs were cheap and popular—people would rather buy a lithograph of some popular artist's picture than a nameless water-colour. If she liked to leave a couple of her sketches, he would try to dispose of them, but he could not buy them—and giving her permanent employment was quite out of the question.

'Do you know anything about engraving?' he asked.

Clarissa shook her head sadly.

'Can you draw on the wood?'

'I have never tried, but I daresay I could do that.'

'I recommend you to turn your attention that way. There's a larger field for that sort of thing. You might exhibit some of your sketches at the next Water-Colour Exhibition. They would stand a chance of selling there.'

'Thanks. You are very good, but I want remunerative employment immediately.'

She wandered on—from dealer to dealer, hoping against hope, always with the same result—from Rathbone-place to Regent-street, and on to Bond-street, and homewards along Oxford-street, and then back to her baby, broken-hearted.

'It is no use, Jane,' she sobbed. 'I can understand my brother's life now. Art is a broken reed. We must get away from this dreadful London—how pale my Lovel is looking!—and go into some quiet country-place, where we can live very cheaply. I almost wish I had stayed in Belgium—in one of the small out-of-the-way towns, where we might

have been safely hidden. We must go down to the country, Jane, and I must take in plain needlework.'

'I'm a good un at that, you know, mum,' Jane cried, with a delighted grin.

And then they began to consider where they should go. That was rather a difficult question. Neither of them knew any world except the region surrounding Arden Court. At last Clarissa remembered Beckenham. She had driven through Beckenham once on her way to a garden-party. Why should they not go to Beckenham—the place was so near London, could be reached with so little expense, and yet was rustic.

'We must get rid of one of the rings, Jane,' Clarissa said, looking at it doubtfully.

'I'll manage that, mum—don't you fidget yourself about that. There's a pawnbroker's in the next street. I'll take it round there in the evening, if you like, mum.'

Clarissa shuddered. Commerce with a pawnbroker seemed to her inexperience a kind of crime—something like taking stolen property to be melted down.

But Jane Target was a brave damsel, and carried

the ring to the pawnbroker with so serene a front, and gave her address with so honest an air, that the man, though at first inclined to be doubtful, believed her story; namely, that the ring belonged to her mistress, a young married lady who had suffered a reverse of fortune.

She went home rejoicing, having raised fifteen pounds upon a ring that was worth ninety. The pawnbroker had a notion that it would never be redeemed—young married ladies who suffer reverse of fortune rarely recover their footing, but generally slide down, down, down to the uttermost deeps of poverty.

They were getting ready for that journey to Beckenham, happy in the idea of escaping from the monotonous unfriendly streets, and the grime and mire and general dinginess of London life, when an unlooked-for calamity befell them, and the prospect of release had, for the time at least, to be given up. Young Lovel fell ill. He was 'about his teeth,' the woman of the house said, and tried to make light of the evil. These innocents are subject to much suffering in this way. He had a severe cold, with a tiresome hacking cough which rent Clarissa's heart. She sent for a doctor immediately—a neighbouring

practitioner recommended by the landlady—and he came and saw the child lying in his mother's lap, and the mother young and beautiful and unhappy, and was melted accordingly, and did all he could to treat the matter lightly. Yet he was fain, after a few visits, and no progress for the better, to confess that these little lives hang by a slender thread.

'The little fellow has a noble frame and an excellent constitution,' he said; 'I hope we shall save him.'

Save him! An icy thrill went through Clarissa's veins. Save him! Was there any fear of losing him? O God, what would her life be without that child? She looked at the doctor, white to the lips, and speechless with horror.

'I don't wish to alarm you,' he said gently, 'but I am compelled to admit that there is danger. If the little one's father is away,' he added doubtfully, 'and you would like to summon him, I think it would be as well to do so.'

'O, my flower, my angel, my life!' she cried, flinging herself down beside the child's bed; 'I cannot lose you!'

'I trust in God you will not,' said the surgeon. 'We will make every effort to save him.' And then

he turned to Jane Target, and murmured his directions.

'Is there any one else,' said Clarissa in a hoarse voice, looking up at the medical man—'any one I can send for besides yourself—any one who can cure my baby?'

'I doubt whether it would be of any use. The case is such a simple one. I have fifty such in a year. But if you would like a physician to see the little fellow, there is Dr. Ormond, who has peculiar experience in children's cases. You might call him in, if you liked.'

'I will send for him this minute.—Jane dear, will you go?'

'I don't think it would be any use, just now. He will be out upon his rounds. There is no immediate danger. If you were to send to him this evening—a note would do—asking him to call to-morrow—that would be the best way. Remember, I don't for a moment say the case is hopeless. Only, if you have any anxiety about the little one's father, and if he is within a day's journey, I would really advise you to send for him.'

Clarissa did not answer. She was hanging over the bed, watching every difficult breath with unutter-

able agony. The child had only begun to droop a week ago, had been positively ill only four days.

All the rest of that day Clarissa was in a kind of stupor. She watched the child, and watched Jane administering her remedies, and the landlady coming in now and then to look at the boy, or to ask about him, with a friendly anxiety. She tried to help Jane sometimes, in a useless tremulous way, sometimes sat statue-like, and could only gaze. She could not even pray—only now and then she whispered with her dry lips, 'Surely God will not take away my child!'

At dusk the doctor came again, but said very little. He was leaving the room, when Clarissa stopped him with a passionate despairing cry. Until that moment she had seemed marble.

'Tell me the truth,' she cried. 'Will he be taken away from me? He is all the world to me—the only thing on earth I have to love. Surely God will not be so pitiless! What difference can one angel more make in heaven? and he is all the world to me.'

'My dear lady, these things are ordered by a Wisdom beyond our comprehension,' the doctor answered gently. That picture of a disconsolate mother

was very common to him—only Clarissa was so much lovelier than most of the mothers, and her grief had a more romantic aspect and touched him a little more than usual. 'Believe me, I shall make every effort to pull the little fellow through,' he added with the professional air of hopefulness. 'Have you written to Dr. Ormond?'

'Yes, my letter was posted an hour after you called.'

'Then we shall hear what he says to-morrow. You can have no higher opinion. And now pray, my dear Mrs. Graham'—Clarissa had called herself Graham in these Soho lodgings—'pray keep up your spirits; remember, your own health will suffer if you give way—and I really do not think you are strong.'

He looked at her curiously as he spoke. She was deadly pale, and had a haggard look which aged her by ten years: beauty less perfect in its outline would have been obscured by that mental anguish—hers shone through all, ineffaceable.

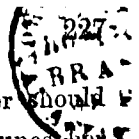
'Do not forget what I said about the little one's father,' urged the doctor, lingering for a minute on the threshold. 'There is really too great a responsibility in keeping him ignorant of the case, if he is anywhere within reach.'

Clarissa smiled for the first time since her boy's illness—a strange wan smile. She was thinking how Daniel Granger had threatened her with separation from her child; and now Death had come between them to snatch him from both.

'My son!' She remembered the proud serenity, the supreme sense of possession, with which he had pronounced those words.

And the child would die perhaps, and Daniel Granger never look upon his face again. A great terror came into her mind at that thought. What would her husband say to her if he came to claim his boy, and found him dead? For the first time since she had left him—triumphant in the thought of having secured this treasure—the fact that the child belonged to him, as well as to herself, came fully home to her. From the day of the baby's birth she had been in the habit of thinking of him as her own—hers by a right divine almost—of putting his father out of the question, as it were—only just tolerating to behold that doating father's fond looks and caresses—watching all communion between those two with a lurking jealousy.

Now all at once she began to feel what a sacred bond there was between the father and son, and how



awful a thing it would be, if Daniel Granger should find his darling dead. Might he not denounce her as the chief cause of his boy's death? Those hurried journeys by land and sea—that rough shifting to and fro of the pampered son and heir, whose little life until that time had been surrounded with such luxurious indulgences, so guarded from the faintest waft of discomfort—who should say that these things had not jeopardised the precious creature? And out of her sin had this arisen. In that dread hour by her darling's sick-bed, what unutterably odious colours did her flirtation with George Fairfax assume—her dalliance with temptation, her weak hankering after that forbidden society! She saw, as women do see in that clear after-light which comes with remorse, all the guilt and all the hatefulness of her sin.

'God gave me my child for my redemption,' she said to herself, 'and I went on sinning.'

What was it the doctor had said? Again and again those parting words came back to her. The father should be summoned. But to summon him, to reveal her hiding-place, and then have her darling taken from her, saved from the grasp of death only to be torn from her by his pitiless unforgiving father!

No thought of what Daniel Granger had been to her in all the days of her married life arose to comfort or reassure her. She only thought of him as he had been after that fatal meeting in her brother's painting-room; and she hoped for no mercy from him.

'And even if I were willing to send for him, I don't know where he is,' she said at last helplessly.

Jane Target urged her to summon him.

'If you was to send a telegraft to the Court, mum, Miss Granger is pretty sure to be there, and she'd send to her pa, wherever he was.'

Clarissa shivered. Send to Miss Granger! suffer those cold eyes to see the depth of her humiliation! That would be hard to endure. Yet what did anything in the world matter to her when her boy was in jeopardy?

'We shall save him, Jane,' she said with a desperate hopefulness, clasping her hands and bending down to kiss the troubled little one, who had brief snatches of sleep now and then in weary hours of restlessness. 'We shall save him. The doctor said so.'

'God grant we may, mum! But the doctor didn't say for certain—he only said he *hoped;* and it

would be so much better to send for master. It seems a kind of crime not to let him know; and if the poor dear should grow worse—'

'He will not grow worse!' cried Clarissa hysterically. 'What, Jane! are you against me? Do you want me to be robbed of him, as his father would rob me without mercy? No, I will keep him, I will keep him! Nothing but death shall take him from me.'

Later in the evening, restless with the restlessness of a soul tormented by fear, Clarissa began to grow uneasy about her letter to Dr. Ormond. It might miscarry in going through the post-office. She was not quite sure that it had been properly directed, her mind had been so bewildered when she wrote it. Or Dr. Ormond might have engagements next morning, and might not be able to come. She was seized with a nervous anxiety about this.

'If there were any one I could send with another note,' she said.

Jane shook her head despondently. In that house there was no messenger to be procured. The landlady was elderly, and kept no servant—employing only a mysterious female of the charwoman species, who came at daybreak, dyed herself to the elbows with blacking or blacklead before breakfast,

and so remained till the afternoon, when she departed to 'do for' a husband and children—the husband and children passing all the earlier part of the day in a desolate and un-'done-for' condition.

'There's no one to take a letter, mum,' said Jane, looking wistfully at her mistress, who had been watching without rest or slumber for three days and three nights. 'But why shouldn't you go yourself, mum? Cavendish-square isn't so very far. Don't you remember our going there one morning with baby? It's a fine evening, and a little fresh air would do you good.'

Clarissa was quite willing to go on the errand herself. It would be doing something, at least. She might see the physician, and obtain his promise to come to her early next day; and beside that sick-bed she was of so little use. She could only hold her darling in her lap, when he grew weary of his bed, or carry him up and down the room sometimes. Jane, whose nerves were as steady as a rock, did all the rest.

She looked at the bed. It was hard to leave that tender little sufferer even for half an hour.

'If he should grow worse while I am away?' she said doubtfully.

'No fear of that,' replied Jane. 'He's sleeping better now than he has slept for ever so long. God grant he's upon the turn!'

'God grant it! And you won't forget the medicine at half-past eight?'

'Lor', mum, as if I should forget!'

'Then I'll go,' said Clarissa.

She put on her bonnet and shawl, startled a little by the white face that looked at her from the glass. The things she had worn when she left Paris were the darkest and plainest in her wardrobe. They had grown shabby by this time, and had a very sombre look. Even in these garments the tall slim figure had a certain elegance; but it was not a figure to be remarked at nightfall, in the London streets. The mistress of Arden Court might have been easily mistaken for a sempstress going home from her work.

Just at first the air made her giddy, and she tottered a little on the broad pavement of the quiet *cul-de-sac*. It seemed as if she had not been out of doors for a month. But by degrees she grew more accustomed to the keen March atmosphere and the noise of Oxford-street, towards which she was hastening, and so hurried on, thinking only of her errand. She made her way somehow to Cavendish-square. How

well she remembered driving through it in the summer gloaming, during the brief glory of her one season, on her way to a commercial magnate's Tusculum in the Regent's-park! It had seemed remote and out of the world after Mayfair—a locality which one might be driven by reverse of fortune to inhabit, not otherwise. But to-night the grave old square had an alarming stateliness of aspect after slipshod Soho.

She found Dr. Ormond's house, and saw his butler, a solemn bald-headed personage, who looked wise enough to prescribe for the most recondite diseases of humanity. The doctor himself was dining out, but the butler pledged himself for his master's appearance at Clarissa's lodgings between eleven and two to-morrow.

'He never disappints; and he draws no distinctions,' said the official, with an evident reference to the humility of the applicant's social status. 'There's not many like him in the medical perfession.'

'And you think he is sure to come?' urged Clarissa anxiously.

'Don't you be afraid, mum. I shall make a particular pint of it myself. You may be quite easy about his comin'.'

Clarissa thanked the man, and surprised him

with half-a-crown gently slipped into his fat palm. She had not many half-crowns now; but the butler seemed to pity her, and might influence his master to come to her a little sooner than he would come in the ordinary way.

Her errand being done, she turned away from the house with a strange sinking at the heart. An ever-present fear of his illness coming to a fatal end, and a guilty sense of the wrong she was doing to Daniel Granger, oppressed her. She walked in a purposeless way, took the wrong turning after coming out of the square, and so wandered into Portland-place. She came to a full stop suddenly in that wide thoroughfare, and looking about her like an awakened sleep-walker, perceived that she had gone astray — recognised the place she was in, and saw that she was within a few doors of Lady Laura Armstrong's house.

Although the London season had begun, there was an air of stillness and solitude in this grave habitation of splendours that have for the most part vanished. At one door there was a carriage waiting; here and there lighted windows shone out upon the night; but the general aspect was desolation. If there were gaiety and carousing anywhere, closed

shutters hid the festival from the outer world. The underground world of Egypt could scarcely have seemed more silent than Portland-place.

Clarissa went on to the familiar corner house, which was made conspicuous to the stranger by encaustic tiled balconies, or glass fern and flower cases at every available window, and by a certain colour and glitter which seemed almost a family likeness to Lady Laura herself. There were lights burning dimly in the two last windows on the drawing-room floor, looking into the side street. Clarissa remembered the room very well—it was Lady Laura's own especial sanctum, the last and smallest of four drawing-rooms — a nest lined with crimson silk, and crowded with everything foolish in the way of ebony and ormolu, Venetian glass and Sèvres china, and with nothing sensible in it except three or four delicious easy-chairs of the *pouff* species, immortalised by Sardou. Alas for that age of pouff which he satirised with such a caustic pen! To what dismal end has it come! End of powder and petroleum, and instead of beauty, burning!

The lonely wanderer, so sorely oppressed with cares and perplexities, looked wistfully up at those familiar windows. How often she had loitered away

the twilight with Lady Laura, talking idly in that flower-laden balcony! As she looked at it to-night, there came into her mind a foolish wonder that life could have had any interest for her in those days, before the birth of her son.

'If I were to lose him now, I should be no poorer than I was then,' she thought; and then, after a moment's reflection, 'O yes, yes, a thousand times poorer, once having had him.'

She walked a little way down the street, and then came back again and lingered under those two windows, with an unspeakable yearning to cast herself upon her friend in this hour of shipwreck. She had such bitter need of sympathy from some one nearer her own level than the poor honest faithful Yorkshire girl.

'She was once my friend,' she said to herself, still hovering there irresolute, 'and seemed very fond of me. She could advise me, knowing the world so well as she does; and I do not think she would betray me. She owes me something, too. But for my promise to her, I might have been George Fairfax's wife, and all this trouble might have been avoided.'

George Fairfax's wife! What a strange dream-

like fancy it seemed! And yet it might have been; it had needed only one little word from herself to make the dream a fact.

'I tried to do my duty,' she thought, 'and yet ruin and sorrow have come upon me.' And then the small still voice whispered, 'Tried to do your duty, but not always; sometimes you left off trying, and dared to be happy in your own way. Between the two roads of vice and virtue, you tried to make a devious pathway of your own, not wholly on one side or the other.'

Once having seen that light, feeling somehow that there was sympathy and comfort near, she could not go away without making some attempt to see her friend. She thought with a remorseful pang of times and seasons during her wedded life when Laura Armstrong's too solicitous friendship had seemed to her something of a bore. How different was it with her now!

She summoned up resolution at last, and in a half desperate mood, went round to the front door and knocked—a tremulous conscience-stricken knock, as of some milliner's apprentice bringing home a delayed bonnet. The man who opened the door looked involuntarily for her basket.

'What is it?' he asked dubiously, scenting a begging-letter writer in the tall slim figure and closely-veiled face, and being on principle averse from gentility that did not ride in its carriage. 'What is it, young woman?'

'Can I see Lady Laura Armstrong? I want to see her very particularly.'

'Have you got an appointment?'

'No; but I wish to see her.'

'You're from Madame Lecoudre's, I suppose. You can see my lady's maid; but it's quite out of the question for you to see my lady herself, at this time of night.'

'Will you take a message to her, on a slip of paper? I am almost sure she will see me.' And again Clarissa opened her slender purse, and slipped a florin into the man's hand, by way of bribe.

He was somewhat melted by this, but yet had an eye to the portable property in the hall.

'You can come in,' he said, pointing with a lofty air to a table whereon were pens and paper, 'and write your message.' And then rang an electric bell, which summons brought a second powdered footman, who was, as it were, a Corsican Brother or Siamese Twin, without the ligature, to the first.

Clarissa scrawled a few hasty lines on a sheet of paper, and folded it.

'Be so kind as to take that to your mistress,' she said. 'I am sure she will see me.'

The second footman was that superior young man, Norris, whom Hannah Warman had praised. He stared aghast, recognising Mrs. Granger's voice and bearing, in spite of the thick veil folded over her face, in spite of her shabby garments.

'My lady shall have your note immediately, ma'am,' he said with profound respect, and sped off as if to carry the message of a cabinet minister, much to the bewilderment of his brother officer, who did not know Mrs. Granger.

He reappeared in about two minutes, and ushered Clarissa duly up the broad staircase—dimly lighted to-night, the family being in Portland-place, in a kind of semi-state, only newly arrived, and without so much as a hall-porter — through the corridor, where there were velvet-cushioned divans against the walls, whereon many among Lady Laura's guests considered it a privilege to sit on her great reception nights, content to have penetrated so far, and with no thought of struggling farther, and on to the white-

and-gold door at the farther end, which admitted the elect into my lady's boudoir.

Laura Armstrong was sitting at an ebony writing-table, with innumerable little drawers pulled out to their utmost extent, and all running over with papers, a chaotic mass of open letters before her, and a sheet of foolscap scrawled over with names. She had been planning her campaign for the season—so many dinners, so many dances, alternate Thursdays in May and June; and a juvenile fancy ball, at which a Pompadour of seven years of age could lead off the Lancers with a Charles the Twelfth of ten, with an eight-year-old Mephistopheles and a six-year-old Anna Boleyn for their *vis-à-vis*.

As the footman opened the door, and ushered in Mrs. Granger, there was a faint rustling of silk behind the portière dividing Lady Laura's room from the next apartment; but Clarissa was too agitated to notice this.

Laura Armstrong received her with effusion.

'My dearest girl,' she exclaimed, rising, and grasping both Clarissa's hands, as the man closed the door, 'how glad I am to see you! Do you know, something told me you would come to me? Yes, dear; I said to myself ever so many times,

"That poor misguided child will come to me." O, Clary, Clary, what have you been doing! Your husband is like a rock. He was at Arden for a few days, about a fortnight ago, and I drove over to see him, and entreated him to confide in me; but he would tell nothing. My poor, poor child! how pale, how changed!'

She had thrown back Clarissa's veil, and was scrutinising the haggard face with very womanly tenderness.

'Sit down, dear, and tell me everything. You know that you can trust me. If you had gone ever so wrong—and I don't believe it is in you to do that—I would still be your friend.'

Clarissa made a faint effort to speak, and then burst into tears. This loving welcome was quite too much to bear.

'He told me he was going to take my boy away from me,' she sobbed, 'so I ran away from him, with my darling—and now my angel is dying!'

And then, with many tears, and much questioning and ejaculation from Lady Laura, she told her pitiful story—concealing nothing, not even her weak yielding to temptation, not even her love for George Fairfax.

'I loved him always,' she said; 'yes—always, always, always—from that first night when we travelled together! I used to dream of him sometimes, never hoping to see him again, till that summer day when he came suddenly upon me in Marley Wood. But I kept my promise; I was true to you, Lady Laura; I kept my promise.'

'My poor Clary, how I wish I had never exacted that promise! It did no good; it did not save Geraldine, and it seems to have made you miserable. Good gracious me,' cried Lady Laura with sudden impetuosity, 'I have no patience with the man! What is one man more than another, that there should be so much fuss about him?'

'I must go home to Lovel,' Clarissa said anxiously. 'I don't know how long I have been away from him. I lost my head, almost; and I felt that I *must* come to you.'

'Thank God you did come, you poor wandering creature! Wait a few minutes, Clary, while I send for a cab, and put on my bonnet. I am coming with you.'

'You, Lady Laura?'

'Yes, and I too,' said a calm voice, that Clarissa remembered very well; and looking up at the door of communication between the two rooms, she saw

the portière pushed aside, and Geraldine Challoner on the threshold.

'Let me come and nurse your baby, Mrs. Granger,' she said gently; 'I have had a good deal of experience of that sort of thing.'

'You do not know what an angel she is to the poor round Hale,' said Lady Laura; 'especially to the children. And she nursed three of mine, Maud, Ethel, and Alick—no; Stephen, wasn't it?' she asked, looking at her sister for correction—'through the scarlatina. Nothing but her devotion could have pulled them through, my doctor assured me. Let her come with us, Clary.'

'O, yes, yes! God bless you, Lady Geraldine, for wanting to help my darling!'

'Norris, tell Fosset to bring me my bonnet and shawl, and fetch a cab immediately; I can't wait for the carriage.'

Five minutes afterwards, the three women were seated in the cab, and on their way to Soho.

'You have sent for Mr. Granger, of course,' said Lady Laura.

'No, not yet. I trust in God there may be no necessity; my darling will get well; I know he will! Dr. Ormond is to see him to-morrow.'

'What, Clarissa! you have not sent for your husband, although you say that his boy is in danger?'

'If I let Mr. Granger know where I am, he will come and take my son away from me.'

'Nonsense, Clary; he can't do that. It is very shameful of you to keep him in ignorance of the child's state.' And as well as she could, amidst the rattling of the cab, Lady Laura tried to awaken Clarissa to a sense of the wrong she was doing.

Jane Target stared in amazement on seeing her mistress return with these two ladies.

'O, ma'am, I've been so frightened!' she exclaimed. 'I couldn't think what was come of you.'

Clarissa ran to the bed.

'He has been no worse?' she asked eagerly.

'No, ma'am. I do think, if there's any change, it is for the better.'

'O thank God, thank God!' cried Clarissa hysterically, falling on her knees by the bed. 'Death shall not rob me of him! Nobody shall take him from me!' And then, turning to Laura Armstrong, she said, 'I need not send for my husband, you see; my darling will recover.'

CHAPTER XVI.

'STRANGERS YET.'

LADY LAURA went back to Portland-place in an hour; but Geraldine Challoner stayed all night with the sick child. God was very merciful to Clarissa; the angel of death passed by. In the night the fever abated, if only ever so little; and Dr. Ormond's report next day was a cheering one. He did not say the little one was out of danger; but he did say there was hope.

Lady Geraldine proved herself an accomplished nurse. The sick child seemed more tranquil in her arms than even in his mother's. The poor mother felt a little pang of jealousy as she saw that it was so; but bore the trial meekly, and waited upon Geraldine with humble submission.

'How good you are!' she murmured once, as she watched the slim white hands that had played chess

with George Fairfax adjusting poultices—'how good you are!'

'Don't say that, my dear Mrs. Granger. I would do as much for any cottager's child within twenty miles of Hale; it would be hard if I couldn't do it for my sister's friend.'

'Have you always been fond of the poor?' Clarissa asked wonderingly.

'Yes,' Geraldine answered, with a faint blush; 'I was always fond of them. I can get on with poor people better than with my equals sometimes, I think; but I have visited more amongst them lately, since I have gone less into society—since papa's death, in fact. And I am particularly fond of children; the little things always take to me.'

'My baby does, at any rate.'

'Have you written or telegraphed to Mr. Granger?' Lady Geraldine asked gravely.

'No, no, no; there can be no necessity now. Dr. Ormond says there is hope.'

'Hope, yes; but these little lives are so fragile. I implore you to send to him. It is only right.'

'I will think about it, by and by, perhaps, if he should grow any worse; but I know he is getting better. O, Lady Geraldine, have some pity upon me!

If my husband finds out where I am, he will rob me of my child.'

The words were hardly spoken, when there was a loud double-knock at the door below, a delay of some two minutes, and then a rapid step on the stair—a step that set Clarissa's heart beating tumultuously. She sat down by the bed, clinging to it like an animal at bay, guarding her cub from the hunter.

The door was opened quickly, and Daniel Granger came into the room. He went straight to the bed, and bent down to look at his child.

The boy had been light-headed in the night, but his brain was clear enough now. He recognised his father, and smiled—a little wan smile, that went to the strong man's heart.

'My God, how changed he is!' exclaimed Mr. Granger. 'How long has he been ill?'

'Very little more than a week, sir,' Jane Target faltered from the background.

'More than a week! and I am only told of his illness to-day, by a telegram from Lady Laura Armstrong! I beg your pardon, Lady Geraldine; I did not see you till this moment. I owe it to your sister's consideration that I am here in time to see my boy before he dies.'

'We have every hope of saving him,' said Geraldine.

'And what a place I find him in! He has had some kind of doctor attending him, I suppose?'

'He has had a surgeon from the neighbourhood, who seems both kind and clever, and Dr. Ormond.'

Mr. Granger seated himself at the foot of the bed, a very little way from Clarissa, taking possession of his child, as it were.

'Do you know, Mrs. Granger, that I have scarcely rested night or day since you left Paris, hunting for my son?' he said. And this was the first time he acknowledged his wife's presence by word or look.

Clarissa was silent. She had been betrayed, she thought—betrayed by her own familiar friend; and Daniel Granger had come to rob her of her child. Come what might, she would not part with him without a struggle.

After this, there came a weary time of anxious care and watching. The little life trembled in the balance; there were harassing fluctuations, a fortnight of unremitting care, before a favourable issue could be safely calculated upon. And during all that time Daniel Granger watched his boy with only the briefest intervals for rest or refreshment. Clarissa

watched too; nor did her husband dispute her right to a place in the sick-room, though he rarely spoke to her, and then only with the coldest courtesy.

Throughout this period of uncertainty, Geraldine Challoner was faithful to the duty she had undertaken; spending the greatest part of her life at Clarissa's lodgings, and never wearying of the labours of the sick-room. The boy grew daily fonder of her; but, with a womanly instinct, she contrived that it should be Clarissa who carried him up and down the room when he was restless — Clarissa's neck round which the wasted little arm twined itself.

Daniel Granger watched the mother and child sometimes with haggard eyes, speculating on the future. If the boy lived, who was to have him? The mother, whose guilt or innocence was an open question—who had owned to being at heart false to her husband—or the father, who had done nothing to forfeit the right to his keeping? And yet to part them was like plucking asunder blossom and bud, that had grown side by side upon one common stem. In many a gloomy reverie the master of Arden Court debated this point.

He could never receive his wife again—upon that question there seemed to him no room for doubt. To

take back to his home and his heart the woman who had confessed her affection for another man, was hardly in Daniel Granger's nature. Had he not loved her too much already — degraded himself almost by so entire a devotion to a woman who had given him nothing, who had kept her heart shut against him?

'She married Arden Court, not me,' he said to himself; 'and then she tried to have Arden Court and her old lover into the bargain. Would she have run away with him, I wonder, if he had had time to persuade her that day? *Can* any woman be pure, when a man dares ask her to leave her husband?'

And then the locket that man wore—'From Clarissa'—was not that damning evidence?

He thought of these things again and again, with a weary iteration—thought of them as he watched the mother walking slowly to and fro with her baby in her arms. *That* picture would surely live in his mind for ever, he thought. Never again, never any more, in all the days to come, could he take his wife back to his heart; but, O God, how dearly he had loved her, and how desolate his home would be without her! Those two years of their married life seemed to be all his existence; looking back beyond

that time, his history seemed, like Viola's, 'A blank, my lord.' And he was to live the rest of his life without her. But for that ever-present anxiety about the child, which was in some wise a distraction, the thought of these things might have driven him mad.

At last, after those two weeks of uncertainty, there came a day when Dr. Ormond pronounced the boy out of danger—on the very high-road to recovery, in fact.

'I would say nothing decided till I could speak with perfect certainty,' he said. 'You may make yourselves quite happy now.'

Clarissa knelt down and kissed the good old doctor's hand, raining tears upon it in a passion of gratitude. He seemed to her in that moment something divine, a supernal creature, who, by the exercise of his power, had saved her child.

Dr. Ormond lifted her up, smiling at her emotion.

'Come, come, my dear soul, this is hysterical,' he said, in his soothing paternal way, patting her shoulder gently as he spoke; 'I always meant to save the little fellow; though it has been a very severe bout, I admit, and we have had a tussle for it. And now I expect to see your roses come back

again. It has been a hard time for you as well as for baby.'

When Mr. Granger went out of the room with the physician presently, Dr. Ormond said gravely,

'The little fellow is quite safe, Mr. Granger; but you must look to your wife now.'

'What do you mean?'

'She has a nasty little hacking cough—a chest cough—which I don't like; and there's a good deal of incipient fever about her.'

'If there is anything wrong, for God's sake see to her at once!' cried Daniel Granger. 'Why didn't you speak of this before?'

'There was no appearance of fever until to-day. I didn't wish to worry her with medicines while she was anxious about the child; indeed, I thought the best cure for her would be the knowledge of his safety. But the cough is worse to-day; and I should certainly like to prescribe for her, if you will ask her to come in here and speak to me for a few minutes.'

So Clarissa went into the dingy lodging-house sitting-room to see the doctor, wondering much that any one could be interested in such an insignificant matter as *her* health, now that her treasure was safe. She went reluctantly, murmuring that she was well

enough—quite well now; and had hardly tottered into the room, when she sank down upon the sofa in a dead faint.

Daniel Granger looked on aghast while they revived her.

'What can have caused this?' he asked.

'My dear sir, you are surely not surprised,' said Dr. Ormond. 'Your wife has been sitting up with her child every night for nearly a month—the strain upon her, bodily and mental, has been enormous, and the reaction is of course trying. She will want a good deal of care, that is all. Come now,' he went on cheerfully, as Clarissa opened her eyes, to find her head lying on Jane Target's shoulder, and her husband standing aloof regarding her with affrighted looks—'come now, my dear Mrs. Granger, cheer up; your little darling is safely over his troubles.'

She burst into a flood of tears.

'They will take him away from me!' she sobbed.

'Take him away from you—nonsense! What are you dreaming of?'

'Death has been merciful; but you will be more cruel,' she cried, looking at her husband. 'You will take him away.'

'Come, come, my dear lady, this is a delusion; you really must not give way to this kind of thing,' murmured the doctor, rather complacently. He had a son-in-law who kept a private madhouse at Wimbledon, and began to think Mrs. Granger was drifting that way. It was sad, of course, a sweet young woman like that; but patients are patients; and Daniel Granger's wife would be peculiarly eligible.

He looked at Mr. Granger, and touched his forehead significantly.

'The brain has been sorely taxed,' he murmured confidentially; 'but we shall set all that right by and by.' This with as confident an air as if the brain had been a clock.

Daniel Granger went over to his wife, and took her hand—it was the first time those two hands had met since the scene in Austin's painting-room—looking down at her gravely.

'Clarissa,' he said, 'on my word of honour, I will not attempt to separate you from your son.'

She gave a great cry—a shriek, that rang through the room—and cast herself upon her husband's breast.

'O, God bless you for that!' she sobbed; 'God bless—' and stopped, strangled by her sobs.

Mr. Granger put her gently back into her faithful handmaiden's arms. *That* was different. He might respect her rights as a mother; he could never again accept her as his wife.

But a time came now in which all thought of the future was swept away by a very present danger. Before the next night, Clarissa was raving in brain-fever; and for more than a month life was a blank to her—or not a blank, an age of confused agony rather, to be looked back upon with horror by and by.

They dared not move her from the cheerless rooms in Soho. Lovel was sent down to Ventnor with Lady Geraldine and a new nurse. It could do no harm to take him away from his mother for a little while, since she was past the consciousness of his presence. Jane Target and Daniel Granger nursed her, with a nursing sister to relieve guard occasionally, and Dr. Ormond in constant attendance.

The first thing she saw, when sense came back to her, was her husband's figure, sitting a little way from the bed, his face turned towards her, gravely watchful. Her first reasonable words—faintly murmured in a wondering tone—moved him deeply; but he was strong enough to hide all emotion.

'When she has quite recovered, I shall go back to Arden,' he said to himself; 'and leave her to plan her future life with the help of Lady Geraldine's counsel. That woman is a noble creature, and the best friend my wife can have. And then we must make some fair arrangement about the boy—what time he is to spend with me, and what with his mother. I cannot altogether surrender my son. In any case he is sure to love her best.'

When Clarissa was at last well enough to be moved, her husband took her down to Ventnor, where the sight of her boy, bright and blooming, and the sound of his first syllables—little broken scraps of language, that are so sweet to mothers' ears—had a better influence than all Dr. Ormond's medicines. Here too came her father, from Nice, where he had been wintering, having devoted his days to the pleasing duty of taking care of himself. He would have come sooner, immediately on hearing of Clarissa's illness, he informed Mr. Granger; but he was a poor frail creature, and to have exposed himself to the north-east winds of this most uncertain climate early in April would have been to run into the teeth of danger. It was the middle of May now, and May this year had come without her accustomed inclemency.

'I knew that my daughter was in good hands,' he said. Daniel Granger sighed, and answered nothing.

Mr. Lovel's observant eyes soon perceived that there was something amiss; and one evening, when he and Mr. Granger were strolling on the sands between Ventnor and Shanklin, he plainly taxed his son-in-law with the fact.

'There is some quarrel between Clary and you,' he said; 'I can see that at a glance. Why, I used to consider you a model couple—perfectly Arcadian in your devotion—and now you scarcely speak to each other.'

'There is a quarrel that must last our lives,' Daniel Granger answered moodily, and then told his story, without reservation.

'Good heavens!' cried Mr. Lovel at the end, 'there is a curse upon that man and his race.'

And then he told his own story, in a very few words, and testified to his undying hatred of all the house of Fairfax.

After this there came a long silence, during which Clarissa's father was meditative.

'You cannot, of course, for a moment suppose that I can doubt my daughter's innocence through-

out this unfortunate business,' he said at last. 'I know the diabolical persistency of that race too well. It was like a Fairfax to entangle my poor girl in his net—to compromise her reputation, in the hope of profiting by his treachery. I do not attempt to deny, however, that Clarissa was imprudent. We have to consider her youth, and that natural love of admiration which tempts women to jeopardise their happiness and character even for the sake of an idle flirtation. I do not pretend that my daughter is faultless; but I would stake my life upon her purity. At the same time I quite agree with you, Granger, that, under existing circumstances, a separation — a perfectly amicable separation, my daughter of course retaining the society of her child — would be the wiser course for both parties.'

Mr. Granger had a sensation as of a volume of cold water dashed suddenly in his face. This friendly concurrence of his father-in-law's took him utterly by surprise. He had expected that Mr. Lovel would insist upon a reconciliation, would thrust his daughter upon her husband at the point of the sword, as it were. He bowed acquiescence, but for some moments could find no words to speak.

'There is no other course open to me,' he said at last. 'I cannot tell you how I have loved your daughter—God alone knows that—and how my every scheme of life has been built up from that one foundation. But that is all over now. I know, with a most bitter certainty, from her own lips, that I have never possessed her heart.'

'I can scarcely imagine that to be the case,' said Mr. Lovel, 'even though Clarissa may have been betrayed into some passionate admission to that effect. Women will say anything when they are angry.'

'This was not said in anger.'

'But at the worst, supposing her heart not to have been yours hitherto, it might not be too late to win it even now. Men have won their wives after marriage.'

'I am too old to try my hand at that,' replied Mr. Granger, with a bitter smile. He was mentally comparing himself with George Fairfax, the handsome soldier, with that indescribable charm of youth and brightness about him.

'If you were a younger man, I would hardly recommend such a separation,' Mr. Lovel went on coolly; 'but at your age—well, existence is quite

tolerable without a wife; indeed, there is a halcyon calm which descends upon a man, when a woman's influence is taken out of his life, that is perhaps better than happiness. You have a son and heir, and that, I should imagine, for a man of your position, is the chief end and aim of marriage. My daughter can come abroad with me, and we can lead a pleasant drowsy life together, dawdling about from one famous city or salubrious watering-place to another. I shall, as a matter of course, surrender the income you have been good enough to allow me; but, *en revanche*, you will no doubt make Clarissa an allowance suitable to her position as your wife.'

Mr. Granger laughed aloud.

'Do you think there can ever be any question of money between us?' he asked. 'Do you think that, if, by the surrender of every shilling I possess, I could win back my faith in my wife, I should hold the loss a heavy one?'

Mr. Lovel smiled, a quiet, self-satisfied smile, in the gloaming.

'He will make her income a handsome one,' he said to himself, 'and I shall have my daughter—who is really an acquisition, for I was beginning to find life solitary—and plenty of ready money. Or

he will come after her in three months' time. That is the result I anticipate.'

They walked till a late moon had risen from the deep blue waters, and when they went back to the house everything was settled. Mr. Lovel answered for his daughter as freely as if he had been answering for himself. He was to take her abroad, with his grandson and namesake Lovel, attended by Jane Target and the new nurse, vice Mrs. Brobson, dismissed for neglect of her charge immediately after Clarissa's flight. If the world asked any questions, the world must be told that Mr. and Mrs. Granger had parted by mutual consent, or that Mrs. Granger's doctor had ordered continental travel. Daniel Granger could settle that point according to his own pleasure; or could refuse to give the world any answer at all, if he pleased.

Mr. Lovel told his daughter the arrangement that he had made for her next morning.

'I am to have my son?' she asked eagerly.

'Yes, don't I tell you so? You and Lovel are to come with me. You can live anywhere you please; you will have a fair income, a liberal one, I daresay. You are very well off, upon my word, Clarissa, taking into consideration the fact of your

supreme imprudence — only you have lost your husband.'

'And I have lost Arden Court. Does not there seem a kind of retribution in that? I made a false vow for the love of Arden Court—and—and for your sake, papa.'

'False fiddlestick!' exclaimed Mr. Lovel impatiently; 'any reasonable woman might have been happy in your position, and with such a man as Granger; a man who positively worshipped you. However, you have lost all that. I am not going to lecture you—the penalty you pay is heavy enough, without any sermonising on my part. You are a very lucky woman to retain custody of your child, and escape any public exposure; and I consider that your husband has shown himself most generous.'

Daniel Granger and his wife parted soon after this; parted without any sign of compunction—there was a dead wall of pride between them. Clarissa felt the burden of her guilt, but could not bring herself to make any avowal of her repentance to the husband who had put her away from him,—so easily, as it seemed to her. *That* touched her pride a little.

On that last morning, when the carriage was

waiting to convey the travellers to Ryde, Mr. Granger's fortitude did almost abandon him at parting with his boy. Clarissa was out of the room when he took the child up in his arms, and put the little arms about his neck. He had made arrangements that the boy was to spend so many weeks in every year with him—was to be brought to him at his bidding, in fact; he was not going to surrender his treasure entirely.

And yet that parting seemed almost as bitter as if it had been for ever. It was such an outrage upon nature; the child, who should have been so strong a link to bind those two hearts, to be taken from him like this, and for no sin of his. Resentment against his wife was strong in his mind at all times, but strongest when he thought of this loss which she had brought upon him. And do what he would, the child would grow up with a divided allegiance, loving his mother best.

One great sob shook him as he held the boy in that last embrace, and then he set him down quietly, as the door opened, and Clarissa appeared in her travelling-dress, pale as death, but very calm.

Just at the last she gave her hand to her husband, and said gently,

'I am very grateful to you for letting me take Lovel. I shall hold him always at your disposal.'

Mr. Granger took the thin cold hand, and pressed it gently.

'I am sorry there is any necessity for a divided household,' he said gravely. 'But fate has been stronger than I. Good-bye.'

And so they parted; Mr. Granger leaving Ventnor later in the day, purposeless and uncertain, to moon away an evening at Ryde, trying to arrive at some decision as to what he should do with himself.

He could not go back to Arden yet awhile, that was out of the question. Farming operations, building projects, everything else, must go on without him, or come to a standstill. Indeed, it seemed to him doubtful whether he should ever go back to the house he had beautified, and the estate he had expanded: to live there alone—as he had lived before his marriage, that is to say, in solitary state with his daughter—must surely be intolerable. His life had been suddenly shorn of its delight and ornament. He knew now, even though their union had seemed at its best so imperfect, how much his wife had been to him.

And now he had to face the future without her.

Good heavens! what a blank dismal prospect it seemed! He went to London, and took up his abode at Claridge's, where his life was unspeakably wearisome to him. He did not care to see people he knew, knowing that he would have to answer friendly inquiries about his wife. He had nothing to do, no interest in life; letters from architect and builder, farm-bailiff and steward, were only a bore to him; he was too listless even to answer them promptly, but let them lie unattended to for a week at a time. He went to the strangers' gallery when there was any debate of importance, and tried to give his mind to politics, with a faint idea of putting himself up for Holborough at the next election. But, as Phèdre says, 'Quand ma bouche implorait le nom de la déesse, j'adorais Hippolyte;' so Mr. Granger, when he tried to think of the Irish-Church question, or the Alabama claims, found himself thinking of Clarissa. He gave up the idea at last, convinced that public life was, for the most part, a snare and a delusion; and that there were plenty of men in the world better able to man the great ship than he. Two years ago he had been more interested in a vestry meeting than he was now in the most stirring question of the day.

Finally, he determined to travel; wrote a brief letter to Sophia, announcing his intention; and departed unattended, to roam the world; undecided whether he should go straight to Marseilles, and thence to Africa, or whether he should turn his face northwards, and explore Norway and Sweden. It ended by his doing neither. He went to Spa to see his boy, from whom he had been separated something over two months.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEGINNING AGAIN.

Mr. Lovel had taken his daughter to Spa, finding that she was quite indifferent whither she went, so long as her boy went with her. It was a pleasant sleepy place out of the season, and he liked it; having a fancy that the mineral waters had done wonders for him. He had a villa on the skirts of the pine-wood, a little way beyond the town; a villa in which there was ample room for young Lovel and his attendants, and from which five minutes' walk took them into shadowy deeps of pine, where the boy might roll upon the soft short grass.

By and by, Mr. Lovel told Clarissa they could go farther afield, travel wherever she pleased, in fact; but, for the present, perfect rest and quiet would be her best medicine. She was not quite out of the doctor's hands yet; that fever had tried her sorely,

and the remnant of her cough still clung to her. At first she had a great terror of George Fairfax discovering her retreat. He had found her at Brussels; why should he not find her at Spa? For the first month of her residence in the quiet inland watering-place she hardly stirred out of doors without her father, and sat at home reading or painting day after day, when she was longing to be out in the wood with her baby and nurse.

But when the first four weeks had gone by, and left her unmolested, Mrs. Granger grew bolder, and wandered out every day with her child, and saw the young face brighten daily with a richer bloom, as the boy gained strength, and was almost happy. The pine-wood was very pretty; but those slender trees, shooting heavenwards, lacked the grandeur of the oaks and beeches of Arden, and very often Clarissa thought of her old home with a sigh. After all, it was lost to her; twice lost, by a strange fatality, as it seemed.

In these days she thought but seldom of George Fairfax. In very truth she was well-nigh cured of her guilty love for him. Her folly had cost her too dear; 'almost the loss of my child,' she said to herself sometimes.

There are passions that wear themselves out, that are by their very nature self-destroying—a lighted candle that will burn for a given time, and then die out with ignominious smoke and sputtering, not the supernal lamp that shines on, star-like, for ever. Solitude and reflection brought this fact home to Clarissa, that her love, fatal as it had been, was not eternal. A woman's heart is scarcely wide enough to hold two great affections; and now baby reigned supreme in the heart of Clarissa. She had plenty of money now at her disposal; Mr. Granger having fixed her allowance at three thousand a year, with extensive powers should that sum prove insufficient; so the Bohemian household under the shadow of St. Gudule profited by her independence. She sent her brother a good deal of money, and received very cheery letters in acknowledgment of her generosity, with sometimes a little ill-spelt scrawl from Bessie, telling her that Austin was much steadier in Brussels than he had been in Paris, and was working hard for the dêâlers, with whom he was in great favour. English and American travellers, strolling down the Montagne de la Cour, were caught by those bright 'taking' bits, which Austin Lovel knew so well how to paint. An elderly Russian princess had

bought his Peach picture, and given him a commission for portraits of a brood of Muscovian bantlings. In one way and another he was picking up a good deal of money; and, with the help of Clarissa's remittances, had contrived to arrange some of those awkward affairs in Paris.

'Indeed, there is very little in this world that money won't settle,' he wrote to his sister; 'and I anticipate that enlightened stage of our criminal code when wilful murder will be a question of pounds, shillings, and pence. I fancy it in a police report: "The fine was immediately paid, and Mr. Greenacre left the court with his friends." I have some inclination to go back to my old quarters in the only city I love; there is a Flemish buffet in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard that was a fortune to me in my backgrounds; but the little woman pleads so earnestly against our return, that I give way. Certainly, Paris is a dangerous place for a man of my temperament, who has not yet mastered the supreme art of saying no at the right moment. I am very glad to hear you are happy with your father and the little one. I wish I had him here for a model; my own boys are nothing but angles. Yet I would rather hear of you in your right position with your husband. That

fellow Fairfax is a scoundrel; I despise myself for ever having asked him to put his name to a bill; and, still more, for being blind to his motives when he was hanging about my painting-room last winter. You have had a great escape, Clary; and God grant you wisdom to avoid all such perilous paths in time to come. Preachment of any kind comes with an ill grace from me, I know; but I daresay you remember what Portia says: "If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces;" and every man, however fallen, has a kind of temple in his breast, wherein is enshrined the image of his nearest and dearest. Let my garments be never so besmirched and bedraggled, my sister's robes must be spotless.'

'There was comfort in these good tidings of her brother—comfort for which Clarissa was very grateful to Providence. She would have been glad to go to Brussels to see him, but had that ever-present terror of coming athwart the pathway of George Fairfax; nor could she go on such an errand without some kind of explanation with her father. She was content to abide, therefore, among the quiet pine-woods and umbrageous avenues, which the holiday

world had not yet invaded, and where she was almost as free to wander with her boy as amidst the beloved woods of Arden Court.

Life thus spent was very peaceful—peaceful, and just a little monotonous. Mr. Lovel sipped his chocolate, and trifled with his maintenon cutlet, at 11 A.M., with an open volume of Burton or Bentley beside his cup, just as in the old days of Clarissa's girlhood. It was just like the life at Mill Cottage, with that one ever fresh and delicious element—young Lovel. That baby voice lent a perpetual music to Clarissa's existence; the sweet companionship of that restless clambering infant seemed to her the perfection of happiness.

And yet—and yet—there *were* times when she felt that her life was a failure, and lamented somewhat that she had so wrecked it. She was not hard of heart; and sometimes she thought of Daniel Granger with a remorseful pang, that came upon her sharply in the midst of her maternal joys; thought of all that he had done for love of her—the sublime patience wherewith he had endured her coldness, the generous eagerness he had shown in the indulgence of her caprices; in a word, the wealth of wasted love he had lavished on an ungrateful woman.

'It is all over now,' she said to herself sadly. 'It is not every woman who in all her lifetime can win so great a love as I have lost.'

The tranquil sensuous life went on. There were hours in it which her child could not fill—long hours, in which that marvellous blossom folded its petals, slumbering sweetly through the summer noontide, and was no better company than a rosebud. Clarissa tried to interest herself in her old studies; took up her Italian, and read Dante with her father, who was a good deal more painstaking in his explanations of obscure idioms and irregular verbs for the benefit of Mrs. Granger with a jointure of three thousand per annum, than he had been wont to show himself for the behoof of Miss Lovel without a sixpence. She drew a great deal; but somehow these favourite pursuits had lost something of their charm. They could not fill her life; it seemed blank and empty in spite of them.

She had her child—the one blessing for which she had prayed—about which she had raved with such piteous bewailings in her delirium; but there was no sense of security in the possession. She was full of doubts and fears about the future. How long would Daniel Granger suffer her to keep her treasure?

Must not the day come when he would put forth his stronger claim, and she would be left bereaved and desolate?

Scarcely could she dare to think of the future; indeed, she did her uttermost to put away all thought of it, so fraught was it with terror and perplexity; but her dreams were made hideous by scenes of parting—weird and unnatural situations, such as occur in dreams; and her health suffered from these shadowy fears. Death, too, had been very near her boy; and she watched him with a morbid apprehension, fearful of every summer breeze that ruffled his flaxen hair.

She was tired of Spa, and secretly anxious to cross the frontier, and wander through Germany, away to the furthermost shores of the Danube; but was fain to wait patiently till her father's medical adviser—an English physician, settled at Spa—should pronounce him strong enough to travel.

'That hurried journey to the Isle of Wight sent me back prodigiously,' Mr. Lovel told his daughter. 'It will take me a month or two to recover the effects of those abominable steamers. The Rhine and the Danube will keep, my dear Clary. The castled crag of Drachenfels can be only a little

mouldier for the delay, and I believe the mouldiness of these things is their principal charm.'

So Clarissa waited. She had not the courage to tell her father of those shapeless terrors that haunted her by day, and those agonising dreams that visited her by night, which she fancied might be driven away by movement and change of scene; she waited, and went on suffering, until at last that supreme egotist, Marmaduke Lovel, was awakened to the fact, that his daughter was looking no better than when he first brought her to Belgium—worse rather, incontestably worse.

He took alarm immediately. The discovery moved him more than he could have supposed anything outside himself could have affected him.

'What?' he asked himself. 'Is my daughter going to languish and fade, as my wife faded? Is she too to die of a Fairfax?'

The English physician was consulted; hummed and ha'd a little, prescribed a new tonic; and finding, after a week or two, that this produced no result, and that the pulse was weaker and more fitful, recommended change of air and scene,—a remedy which common-sense might have suggested in the first instance.

'We will start for Cologne to-morrow morning. Tell Target to pack, Clary. You shall sleep under the shadow of the great cathedral to-morrow night.'

Clarissa thanked her father warmly, and then burst into tears.

'Hysteria,' murmured the physician.

'I shall get away from that dreadful room,' she sobbed, 'where I have such hideous dreams;' and then went away to set Jane Target to work.

'I don't quite like the look of that,' the doctor said gravely, when she was gone. 'Those distressing dreams are a bad sign. But Mrs. Granger is very young, and has an excellent constitution, I believe. Change of scene, and the amusement of travelling, may do all we want.'

He left Mr. Lovel very thoughtful.

'If she doesn't improve speedily, I shall telegraph to Granger,' he said to himself.

He had no occasion to do this. Daniel Granger, after going half way to Marseilles, with a notion of exploring Algiers and Morocco, had stopped short, and made his way by road and rail—through sirocco clouds of dust, and much inconvenience—to Liége, where he had lingered to recover and calm himself d own a little before going to see his child.

Going to see his child—that was the sole purpose of his journey; not for a moment would he have admitted that it mattered anything to him that he was also going to see his wife.

It was between seven and eight o'clock, on a bright June evening—a flush of rosy light behind the wooded hills—and Clarissa was sitting on some felled timber, with her boy asleep in her arms. He had dropped off to sleep in the midst of his play; and she had lingered, unwilling to disturb him. If he went on sleeping, she would be able to carry him home presently, and put him to bed without awaking him. The villa was not a quarter of a mile away.

She was quite alone with her darling, the nurse being engaged in the grand business of packing. They were all to start the next morning after a very early breakfast. She was looking down at the young sleeper, singing to him softly—a commonplace picture perhaps, but a very fair one—a *Madonna aux champs*.

So thought Daniel Granger, who had arrived at Spa half an hour ago, made his inquiries at the villa, and wandered into the wood in quest of his

only son. The mother's face, with its soft smile of ineffable love, lips half parted, breathing that fragment of a tender song, reminded him of a picture by Raffaelle. She was nothing to him now; but he could not the less appreciate her beauty, spiritualised by sorrow, and radiant with the glory of the evening sunlight.

He came towards the little group silently, his footfall making no sound upon the moss-grown earth. He did not approach quite near, however, in silence, afraid of startling her, but stopped a little way off, and said gently,

'They told me I should most likely find you somewhere about here, with Lovel.'

His wife gave a little cry, and looked up aghast.

'Have you come to take him away from me?' she asked, thinking that her dreams had been prophetic.

'No, no, I am not going to do that; though you told me he was to be at my disposal, remember, and I mean to claim him sometimes. I can't allow him to grow up a stranger to me.—God bless him, how well he is looking! Pray don't look so frightened,' he went on, in an assuring voice, alarmed by the dead whiteness of Clarissa's face; 'I have only

come to see my boy before— The fact is, I have some thoughts of travelling for a year or two. There is a rage for going to Africa nowadays, and I am not without interest in that sort of thing.'

Clarissa looked at him wonderingly. This sudden passion for foreign wanderings seemed to her very strange in him. She had been accustomed to suppose his mind entirely absorbed by new systems of irrigation, and model-village building, and the extension of his estate. His very dreams, she had fancied, were of the hedgerows that bounded his lands—boundaries that vanished day by day, as the lands widened, with now a whole farm added, and now a single field. Could he leave Arden, and the kingdom that he had created for himself, to roam in sandy deserts, and hob-and-nob with Kaffir chiefs under the tropic stars?

Mr. Granger seated himself upon the timber by his wife's side, and bent down to look at his son, and to kiss him gently, without waking him. After that fond lingering kiss upon the little one's smooth cheek, he sat for some minutes in silence, looking at his wife.

It was only her profile he could see; but he saw that she was looking ill, worse than she had looked

when they parted at Ventnor. The sight of the pale face, with a troubled look about the mouth, touched him keenly. Just in that moment he forgot that there was such a being as George Fairfax upon this earth; forgot the sin that his wife had sinned against him; longed to clasp her to his breast; was only deterred by a kind of awkward shyness—to which such strong men as he are sometimes liable—from so doing.

'I am sorry to see that you are not looking very well,' he said at last, with supreme stiffness, and with that peculiarly unconciliating air which an Englishman is apt to put on, when he is languishing to hold out the olive-branch.

'I have not been very well; but I daresay I shall soon be better, now we are going to travel.'

'Going to travel!'

'Yes, papa has made up his mind to move at last. We go to Cologne to-morrow. I thought they would have told you that at the house.'

'No; I only waited to ask where you—where the boy was to be found. I did not even stop to see your father.'

After this there came a dead silence—a silence that lasted for about five minutes, during which

they heard the faint rustle of the pine branches stirred ever so lightly by the evening wind. The boy slept on, unconscious and serene; the mother watching him, and Daniel Granger contemplating both from under the shadow of his eyebrows.

The silence grew almost oppressive at last, and Mr. Granger was the first to break it.

'You do not ask me for any news of Arden,' he said.

Clarissa blushed, and glanced at him with a little wounded look. It was hard to be reminded of the paradise from which she had been exiled.

'I—I beg your pardon. I hope everything is going on as you wish; the home farm, and all that kind of thing. Miss Granger — Sophia, is well, I hope?'

'Sophia is quite well, I believe. I have not seen her since I left Ventnor.'

'She has been away from Arden, then?'

'No; it is I who have not been there. Indeed, I doubt if I shall ever go there again—without you, Clarissa. The place is hateful to me.'

Again and again, with infinite iteration, Daniel Granger had told himself that reconciliation with his wife was impossible. Throughout his journey

by road and rail—and above all things is a long journey conducive to profound meditation—he had been firmly resolved to see his boy, and then go on his way at once, with neither delay nor wavering. But the sight of that pale pensive face to-night had well-nigh unmanned him. Was this the girl whose brightness and beauty had been the delight of his life? Alas, poor child, what sorrow his foolish love had brought upon her! He began all at once to pity her, to think of her as a sacrifice to her father's selfishness, his own obstinacy.

'I ought to have taken my answer that day at the Court, when I first told her my secret,' he said to himself. 'That look of pained surprise, which came into her face when I spoke, might surely have been enough for me. Yet I persisted, and was not man enough to face the question boldly—whether she had any heart to give me.'

Clarissa rose, with the child still in her arms.

'I am afraid the dew is beginning to fall,' she said; 'I had better take Lovel home.'

'Let me carry him,' exclaimed Mr. Granger; and in the next moment the boy was in his father's strong arms, the flaxen head nestling in the paternal waistcoat.

'And so you are going to begin your travels to-morrow morning,' he said, as they walked slowly homeward side by side.

'Yes, the train leaves at seven. But you would like to see more of Lovel, perhaps, having come so far to see him. We can defer our journey for a day or two.'

'You are very good. Yes, I should like you to do that.'

'And with regard to what you were saying just now,' Clarissa said, in a low voice, that was not quite steady, 'I trust you will not let the memory of any pain I may have given you influence your future life, or disgust you with a place to which you were so much attached as I know you were to Arden. Pray put me out of your thoughts. I am not worthy to be regretted by you. Our marriage was a sad mistake on your part—a sin upon mine. I know now that it was so.'

'A mistake—a sin! O, Clary, Clary, I could have been so happy, if you had only loved me a little—if you had only been true to me.'

'I never was deliberately false to you. I was very wicked; yes, I acknowledge that. I did trifle with temptation. I ought to have avoided the re-

motest chance of any meeting with George Fairfax. I ought to have told you the truth, told you all my weakness; but — but I had not the courage to do that. I went to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard to see my brother.'

'Was that honest, Clarissa, to allow me to be introduced to your brother as a stranger?'

'That was Austin's wish, not mine. He would not let me tell you who he was; and I was so glad for you to be kind to him, poor fellow! so glad to be able to see him almost daily; and when the picture was finished, and Austin had no excuse for coming to us any more, I went to see him very often, and sometimes met Mr. Fairfax in his painting-room; but I never went with any deliberate intention of meeting him.'

'No,' interjected Mr. Granger bitterly; 'you only went, knowing that he was likely to be there!'

'And on that unhappy day when you found me there,' Clarissa went on, 'I had gone to see my brother, having no idea that he had left Paris. I wanted to come away at once; but Mr. Fairfax detained me. I was very angry with him.'

'Yes, it appeared so, when he was asking you to run away with him. It is a hard thing for a man

to believe in his wife's honour, when things have come to such a pass as that, Clarissa.'

'I have told you the truth,' she answered gravely; 'I cannot say any more.'

'And the locket—the locket I gave you, which I found on that man's breast?'

'I gave that locket to my sister-in-law, Bessie Lovel. I wished to give her something, poor soul; and I had given Austin all my money. I had so many gifts of yours, Daniel'—that sudden sound of his Christian name sent a thrill through Mr. Granger's veins—'parting with one of them seemed not to matter very much.'

There was a pause. They were very near the villa by this time. Mr. Granger felt as if he might never have an opportunity for speaking to his wife again, if he lost his chance now.

'Clarissa,' he said earnestly, 'if I could forget all that happened in Paris, and put it out of my mind as if it had never been, could you forget it too?'

'With all my heart,' she answered.

'Then, my darling, we will begin the world again —we will begin life over again, Clarissa!'

So they went home together reconciled. And

Mr. Lovel, looking up from Aimé Martin's edition of Molière, saw that what he had anticipated had come to pass. His policy had proved as successful as it had been judicious. In less than three months Daniel Granger had surrendered. This was what came of Mr. Granger's flying visit to his boy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW SUCH THINGS END.

After that reconciliation, which brought a wonderful relief and comfort to Clarissa's mind—and who shall say how profoundly happy it made her husband?—Mr. and Mrs. Granger spent nearly a year in foreign travel. For his own part, Daniel Granger would have been glad to go back to Arden, now that the dreary burden was lifted off his mind, and his broken life pieced together again; but he did not want county society to see his wife till the bloom and brightness had come back to her face, nor to penetrate the mystery of their brief severance. To remain away for some considerable time was the surest way of letting the scandal, if any had ever arisen, die out.

He wrote to his daughter, telling her briefly that

he and his wife had arranged all their little differences—little differences! Sophia gave a shrill scream of indignation as she went over this sentence in her father's letter, scarcely able to believe her eyes at first—and they were going through Germany together, with the intention of wintering at Rome. As Clarissa was still somewhat of an invalid, it would be best for them to be alone, he thought; but he was ready to further any plans for his daughter's happiness during his absence.

Miss Granger replied curtly, that she was tolerably happy at Arden, with her 'duties,' and that she had no desire to go roaming about the world in quest of that contented mind which idle and frivolous persons rarely found, go where they might. She congratulated her father upon the termination of a quarrel which she had supposed too serious to be healed so easily, and trusted that he would never have occasion to regret his clemency. Mr. Granger crushed the letter in his hand, and threw it over the side of the Rhine steamer, on which he had opened his budget of English correspondence, on that particular morning.

They had a very pleasant time of it in Germany, moving in a leisurely way from town to town, seeing

everything thoroughly, without hurry or restlessness. Young Lovel throve apace; the new nurse adored him; and faithful Jane Target was as happy as the day was long, amidst all the foreign wonders that surrounded her pathway. Daniel Granger was contented and hopeful; happy in the contemplation of his wife's fair young face, which brightened daily; in the society of his boy, who, with increasing intelligence, developed an ever-increasing appreciation of his father—the strong arms, that tossed him aloft and caught him so skilfully; the sonorous voice, that rang so cheerily upon his ear; the capacious pockets, in which there was wont to lurk some toy for his delectation.

Towards the middle of November they took up their winter quarters in Rome—not the November of fogs and drizzle, known to the denizens of London, but serene skies and balmy air, golden sunsets, and late-lingering flowers, that seemed loath to fade and vanish from a scene so beautiful. Clarissa loved this city of cities, and felt a thrill of delight at returning to it. She drove about with her two-year-old son, showing him the wonders and glories of the place as fondly as if its classic associations had been within the compass of his budding mind. She went on with

her art-studies with renewed vigour, as if there had been a Raffaelle fever in the very air of the place, and made plans for copying half the pictures in the Vatican. There was plenty of agreeable society in the city, English and foreign; and Clarissa found herself almost as much in request as she had been in Paris. There were art-circles in which she was happiest, and where Daniel Granger held his own very fairly as a critic and connoisseur. And thus the first two winter months slipped away very pleasantly, till they came to January, in which month they were to return to Arden.

They were to return there to assist at a great event—an event the contemplation whereof was a source of unmitigated satisfaction to Mr. Granger, and which was more than pleasing to Clarissa. Miss Granger was going to be married, blest with her papa's consent and approval, of course, and in a manner becoming a damsel whose first consideration was duty. After refusing several very fair offers, during the progress of her girlhood, she had at last suffered herself to be subjugated by the constancy and devotion of Mr. Tillott, the curate of New Arden.

It was not in any sense a good match. Mr. Tillott's professional income was seventy-five pounds a

year; his sole private means an allowance of fifty from his brother, who, Mr. Tillott admitted, with a blush, was in trade. He was neither handsome nor accomplished. The most his best friends could say of him, was, that he was 'a very worthy young man.' He was not an orator: he had an atrocious delivery, and rarely got through the briefest epistle, or collect even, without blundering over a preposition. His demeanour in pulpit and reading-desk was that of a prisoner at the bar, without hope of acquittal; and yet he had won Miss Granger—that prize in the matrimonial market, which many a stout Yorkshireman had been eager to win.

He had flattered her; with a slavish idolatry he had followed her footsteps, and ministered to her caprices, admiring, applauding, and imitating all her works and ways, holding her up for ever as the pattern and perfection of womankind. Five times had Miss Granger rejected him; on some occasions with contumely even, letting him know that there was a very wide gulf between their social positions, and that although she might be spiritually his sister, she stood, in a worldly sense, on a very remote platform from that which it was his mission to occupy. Mr. Tillott swallowed every humiliation with a lowly

spirit, that had in it some leaven of calculation, and bore up against every repulse; until at last the fair Sophia, angry with her father, persistently opposed to her stepmother, and out of sorts with the world in general, consented to accept the homage of this persevering suitor. He, at least, was true to her; he, at least, believed in her perfection. The stout country squires, who could have given her houses and lands, had never stooped to flatter her foibles; had shown themselves heartlessly indifferent to her dragooning of the model villagers; had even hinted their pity for the villagers under that martial rule. Tillott alone could sympathise with her, trudging patiently from cottage to cottage in bleak Christmas weather, carrying parcels of that uncomfortable clothing with which Miss Granger delighted to supply her pensioners.

Nor was the position which this marriage would give her, humble as it might appear, altogether without its charm. As Mr. Tillott's wife, she would be a very great lady amongst small people; and Mr. Tillott himself would be invested with a reflected glory from having married an heiress. The curate stage would, of course, soon be past. The living of Arden was in Mr. Granger's gift; and no doubt the

present rector could be bought out somehow, after a year or so, and Mr. Tillott installed in his place. So, after due deliberation, and after the meek Tillott had been subjected to a trial of his faith which might have shaken the strongest, but which left him firm as a rock, Miss Granger surrendered, and acknowledged that she thought her sphere of usefulness would be enlarged by her union with Thomas Tillott.

'It is not my own feelings which I consider,' remarked the maiden, in a tone which was scarcely flattering to her lover; 'I have always held duty above those. I believe that New Arden is my proper field, and that it is a Providence that leads me to accept a tie which binds me more closely to the place. I could never have remained in *this* house after Mrs. Granger's return.'

Upon this, the enraptured Tillott wrote a humble and explanatory letter to Mr. Granger, stating the blessing which had descended upon him in the shape of Sophia's esteem, and entreating that gentleman's approval of his suit.

It came by return of post, in a few hearty words.

'My dear Tillott,—Yes; with all my heart! I

have always thought you a good fellow; and I hope and believe you will make my daughter a good husband. Mrs. Granger and I will be home in three weeks, in time to make all arrangements for the wedding.—Yours, &c. DANIEL GRANGER.'

'Ah,' said Miss Granger, when this epistle was shown her by her triumphant swain, 'I expected as much. I have never been anything to papa since his marriage, and he is glad to get rid of me.'

The Roman season was at its height, when there arose a good deal of talk about a lady who did not belong to that world in which Mrs. Granger lived, but who yet excited considerable curiosity and interest therein.

She was a Spanish dancer, known as Donna Rita, and had been creating a *furore* in St. Petersburg, Paris, Vienna, all over the civilised world, in fact, except in London, where she was announced as likely to appear during the approaching season. She had taken the world by storm by her beauty, which was exceptional, and by her dancing, which made up in *chic* for anything it may have lacked in genius. She

was not a Taglioni; she was only a splendid dark-haired woman, with eyes that reminded one of Cleopatra, a figure that was simply perfection, the free grace of some wild creature of the forest, and the art of selecting rare and startling combinations of colour and fabric for her dress.

She had hired a villa, and sent a small army of servants on before her to take possession of it—men and women of divers nations, who contrived to make their mistress notorious by their vagaries before she arrived to astonish the city by her own eccentricities. One day brought two pair of carriage horses, and a pair of Arabs for riding; the next, a train of carriages; a week after came the lady herself; and all Rome—English and American Rome most especially—was eager to see her. There was an Englishman in her train, people said. Of course, there was always some one—*elle mange cinq comme ça tous les ans*, remarked a Frenchman.

Clarissa had no curiosity about this person. The idle talk went by her like the wind, and made no impression; but one sunny afternoon, when she was driving with her boy, Daniel Granger having an engagement to look at a new picture which kept him away from her, she met the Senora face to face—

Donna Rita, wrapped in sables to the throat, with a coquettish little turban-shaped sable hat, a couple of Pomeranian dogs on her lap—half reclining in her barouche—a marvel of beauty and insolence. She was not alone. A gentleman—the Englishman, of course—sat opposite to her, and leant across the white bear-skin carriage-rug to talk to her. They were both laughing at something he had just said, which the Senora characterised as '*pas si bête.*'

He looked up as the two carriages passed each other; for just one brief moment looked Clarissa Granger in the face; then, pale as death, bent down to caress one of the dogs.

It was George Fairfax.

It was a bitter ending; but such stories are apt to end so; and a man with unlimited means, and nothing particular to do with himself, must find amusement somehow. Clarissa remained in Rome a fortnight after this, and encountered the Senora several times — never unattended, but never again with George Fairfax.

She heard the story afterwards from Lady Laura. He had been infatuated, and had spent thousands upon 'that creature.' His poor mother had been half broken-hearted about it.

'The Lyvedon estate spoiled him, my dear,' Lady Laura said conclusively. 'He was a very good fellow till he came into his property.'

Mr. Fairfax reformed, however, a couple of years later, and married a fashionable widow with a large fortune; who kept him in a whirl of society, and spent their combined incomes royally. He and Clarissa meet sometimes in society—meet, touch hands even, and know that every link between them is broken.

And is Clarissa happy? Yes, if happiness can be found in children's voices and a good man's unchanging affection.. She has Arden Court, and her children; her father's regard, growing warmer year by year, as with increasing age he feels increasing need of some one to love him; her brother's society now and then—for Mr. Granger has been lavish in his generosity, and all the peccadilloes of Austin's youth have been extinguished from the memories of money-lenders and their like by means of Mr. Granger's cheque-book.

The painter can come to England now, and roam his native woods unburdened by care; but though this is very sweet to him once in a way, he prefers a Continental city, with its *café* life, and singing and

dancing gardens, where he may smoke his cigar in the gloaming. He grows steadier as he grows older, paints better, and makes friends worth making; much to the joy of poor Bessie, who asks no greater privilege than to stand humbly by, gazing fondly while he puts on his white cravat, and sallies forth radiant, with a hot-house flower in his button-hole, to dine in the great world.

But this is only a glance into the future. The story ends in the orthodox manner, to the sound of wedding bells—Miss Granger's—who swears to love, honour, and obey Thomas Tillott, with a fixed intention to keep the upper hand over the said Thomas in all things. Yet these men who are so slavish as wooers are apt to prove of sterner mould as husbands; and life is all before Mrs. Tillott, as she journeys in chariot and posters to Scarborough for her unpretentious honeymoon, to return in a fortnight to a bran-new gothic villa on the skirts of Arden, where one tall tree is struggling vainly to look at home in a barren waste of new-made garden. And in the servants' hall and housekeeper's room at Arden Court there is rejoicing, as when the elder Miss Pecksniff went away from the little village near Salisbury.

For some there are no marriage bells—for Lady Geraldine, for instance, who is content to devote herself unostentatiously to the care of her sister's neglected children — neglected in spite of French and German governesses, Italian singing masters, Parisian waiting-maids, and half an acre or so of nursery and schoolroom—and to wider charities: not all unhappy, and thankful for having escaped that far deeper misery—the fate of an unloved wife.

THE END.

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